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ABSTRACT

Six issues of a University of California, Los Angeles, (UCLA) newsletter by and for teaching assistants (TAs) are presented. Each newsletter is a theme issue, covering writing, anxiety, motivation, TA role, and TA training. Topics include: student problems and psychological and counseling services, philosophies about writing, approaches to making writing assignments, holistic reading of student writing, performance anxiety in students and teachers, writing anxiety, speech anxiety (reticence), math anxiety, motivating university students, the role of TAs with respect to students and faculty, the TA and the faculty adviser, the TA consultant program at UCLA, videotaping, peer observation, TA orientation program in English as a Second Language, the demonstration class, and TA apprenticeship programs in philosophy. (SW)

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THE TA AT UCLA/NEWSLETTER, ISSUES No. 1, 3, 1979

NO. 5, 1980; No. 6, 7, 8, 1981.

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The materials in the Special Collection on the Training of Teaching Assistants were developed through the active efforts of numerous educators who first met at the 1986 National Conference on the Institutional Responsibilities and Responses in the Employment and Education of Teaching Assistants held at the Ohio State University. Assisted by more than 80 individuals, the committee chairs listed below were able to establish the collection which will be developed and maintained by the ERIC Clearinghouse for Higher Education. This arrangement will enable faculty members, faculty developers, administrators, TA supervisors, and graduate teaching assistants to have access to TA training materials produced by institutions across the nation.

Task Force on Establishing a National Clearinghouse of Materials Developed for TA Training

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the TA at UCLA NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 1 January 1979

A PREFACE

This is the first issue of a revised newsletter by, and for, teaching assistants. We will present news items of special concern to TAs, including a column or two of information, and in forthcoming issues will focus on specific topics. We need your input! The next issue will examine some of the problems of cheating. Tell us how **you** deal with it, how **you** prevent it, how **you** are affected by cheaters in your class and how **you** feel about formal and informal disciplinary measures; we will put the issue together so that we may all benefit from your experiences. Write to us at: *The TA at UCLA/Newsletter*, 124A Royce Hall, Campus (or call us at 825-9269). □

GETTING RIGHT WITH WRITING

Graded any papers lately? Are you beginning to wonder why students can't write? Sometimes TAs contribute to the problem by failing to make their expectations clear to the students or by ignoring poor writing and seeking to grade "content" only. The English Department at UCLA has recently provided an effective tool "to help students and teachers in 'righting' the writing they work with." *Righting Writing: A Guide to Composition* by Carol MacKay and Patricia Taylor is a booklet intended to demonstrate how writing may be improved and corrected. It is available at the ASUCLA Bookstore for 75¢ (free copies were distributed at the Fall TA Conference). TAs will find their interest and effort in helping students acquire good writing skills well rewarded the next time stacks of papers arrive to be graded.

The American college teacher is the only high-level professional who enters his career as an "amateur."

James I. Armstrong,
"Who Teaches the Teachers What?",
in *Improving College Teaching*

DISTINGUISHED TA AWARD

TAs who merely go through the motions of teaching often seem to receive the same credit as those who work hard on preparing their classes, organizing discussions, critically reading essays and exams, and creating worthwhile exercises. At worst, students may appear ungrateful for our time and work, professors may be indifferent, and all except our friends and family may be unaware of the commitment given to our jobs.

The intrinsic satisfaction found in teaching is reward enough for the extra effort of many TAs, but the Graduate Division, the Academic Senate and the Office of Instructional Development are seeking further recognition for excellence in teaching. Each year the Graduate Division seeks candidates for the Distinguished Teaching Assistant Award. Each department determines its own nomination procedure and forwards its recommendation(s) to the Academic Senate's Committee on Teaching. Before making its recommendations to the Chancellor, the Committee examines letters from the department concerning the exceptional qualities of the nominee, letters from students and faculty, and a summary of student evaluations.

In 1975, 1976 and 1978 the Senate made five awards, each accompanied by a cash honorarium of $200. In 1977 ten awards were given with a cash award of $100 each. It seems likely that the format of five awards will be maintained again this Spring. In addition, the Office of Instructional Development will host a luncheon attended by University officials for the presentation of the awards. An appropriate certificate will accompany the honors. □

STUDENT PROBLEMS AND PROBLEM STUDENTS

Teaching assistants often achieve closer contact with students than any other member of the University. Occasionally we notice students who have personal problems which prevent them from functioning effectively. It is usually beyond our ability to do more than lend a sympathetic ear. Fortunately, there are two professional services on campus which provide psychological counseling for UCLA students. In this article, representatives of the Student Mental Health Service and the Psychological and Counseling Services describe the structure and functions of their services. Both invite teaching assistants to call on them for help with student behavioral problems.

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE

Who We Are and What We Do

The Student Mental Health Service is an integrated psychiatric service with a staff of psychiatrists, psychologists and clinical social workers whose services are available to any regularly enrolled UCLA student. We see both undergraduate and graduate students; more than half of the students we see are graduate students. There is no fee, and total confidentiality is maintained. No one, on or off campus, has access to our records without the signed consent of the student.

Although we are a part of the Student Health Service and are located in one wing of the Student Health Complex, a student seeking help at our clinic needs no special referral from a doctor or other professional. We accept every student who applies for an initial appointment.

At our clinic we treat the full range of mental health problems. We see students who are having difficulty coping with situational stresses, such as school pressures, exam anxiety, family problems or relationship problems, and we treat students who are suffering from more serious psychological problems.

We are happy to see students for one hour or many hours, depending on their need. Many individuals are seen for an hour to help them to evaluate their problem and to decide whether or not professional help is required.

We have available many diagnostic and therapeutic techniques, including individual therapy, group therapy, psychological testing, marriage or relationship counseling, behavior modification, hypnotherapy and psycho-pharmacological therapy.

The college years are inherently a period of emotional turmoil. This is the time when a person does much of the psychological work that has to be done both to resolve such issues as sexuality, professional and vocational identity, and independence from the family, and to develop the capacity for mature interpersonal relationships as well as the capacity for productive work. Simply being a student at the University also places unusual stresses upon an individual. Therefore it is not surprising that many students find themselves in need of professional help. We want to be available when they do.

When and How A Teaching Assistant Should Refer to the Student Mental Health Service

A teaching assistant is often one of the first members of the campus community to become aware that a student has a problem. A troubled student whose school work is being affected will often tell his TA that his work is late or undone or that he could not take the exam because of personal problems or extreme exam anxiety. On occasion a student will talk to a TA about personal problems even when they are not affecting the student's work, because the TA is seen as an older, wiser, more accessible person who is not as threatening a figure as a professor.

In such cases it would be appropriate for the TA to tell the student that there is a place on campus set up primarily to help students cope with personal problems — a place where a student can come and talk about the things that are troubling him or her.

On rare occasions a TA will notice bizarre or aberrant behavior in a student. A telephone call to the Student Mental Health Service, identifying yourself as a TA who would like to speak to a staff member about a troubled student, will provide you with professional advice in dealing with the situation.

In an emergency, a student will always be seen immediately. With a very distressed student, the TA might consider walking the student to the Student Mental Health Service to make the first contact.

We at the Student Mental Health Service welcome this opportunity to let you know about our service. Our most important function is to help students to continue to function effectively as students and to help with any psychological problems that might impair their ability to benefit fully from their college years.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND COUNSELING SERVICES

The Psychological and Counseling Services in 4223 Math Sciences is a free psychological resource for students. For the TA they have at least two uses: the Services are a back up and referral resource that can save the TA time and anguish in dealing with student problems and problem students, and they are a consultation resource available by phone or visit. You can use them either to discuss how to work with a difficult student or a difficult class problem or as a personal resource for your own needs. The Services are of course confidential. About half our traffic comes from graduate students.

There are two divisions in the Services: a Behavioral Division and a Counseling Division. You can refer a student to a specific division; he or she can often figure this out for himself or herself from the description on our Bookmark. Or you can simply refer them to the Services. The Behavioral Division most often deals with students who want help in carrying out specific changes they want to see in themselves, the use of time, their emotional response to various situations, thought patterns or perspectives, their behavior with other people such as friends, partners or employers, test anxiety, eating behavior, or expressing themselves. The Counseling Division most often works with students who want help in clarifying feelings and issues — what's troubling them; in exploring alternatives, making difficult decisions or plans; in better understanding themselves or their relationships; or in handling intense emotional experiences like separation or loss, personal crisis, academic major and career plans, or difficulties with spouses, partners, boyfriends or girlfriends.

TAs have identified three kinds of situations where they have found the Psychological and Counseling Services helpful: the student who wants to tell his or her troubles or pain to the TA; the student whose behavior in class is difficult or disruptive, but the TA is uncertain of how to act for fear of worsening the student's situation; and where the TA himself or herself is concerned about a student and wants to be helpful but is uncertain of how to convey this to the student. There are straightforward ways of handling each of these — at least, with a little experience. We'll try to deal with one of them in our short space. We hope you'll call us to discuss the others or any question you may have. Our numbers are 825-0768 and 825-4207.

For the first case, simply listening seems to be the humane thing to do. However, TAs tell us — and our experience supports this — that this may lead the student to unburden himself or herself, and you find yourself over your head in time and complexity. Experienced TAs tend to favor the helpful and supportive referral. For example, after the first rush of expression, or the tentative feeler, one response can be, "I'd like to respond to that; I'd like to be helpful. I can't myself. I couldn't and do justice to all the other student demands I'm supposed to meet. I'm not sure I have the background or experience. I **can** help you find someone. There's an excellent service on campus I've referred other students to. They've liked it." (Then you can describe the Services. Better still, give them one of our Bookmarks that describe the Services and a folder which shows how to get there. We'll be glad to send you some.)

You can then say, "Would you like me to call and see if I can make an appointment for you with a counselor?" (If you've met some of us and can use a name, it's easier.) In any event, it's always a good idea to offer to make the referral contact. If the student says no, he or she can get there okay, but offer. In the case of a truly disturbed or depressed student, it's often a good idea to walk him or her over. If you can't leave, and you think it's important, call us and we'll try to send someone to your office.

There are similar ways of handling the other cases. We hope you will give us a call or pay us a visit. We'd like to show you our setting and describe our Services. Just call 825-0768 or 825-4207 or come to 4223 Math Sciences. And let us know if you'd like some of our Bookmarks. □

Education should be guided by a democratic philosophy. This has nothing to do with politico-social doctrine, but is simply a statement of my belief that education is a cooperative enterprise that works best when the student is allowed to contribute to it — when teachers listen and respond.

Wilbert J. McKeachie in *Teaching Tips*

STEERING COMMITTEE FORMED FOR TA CONFERENCE

The Fifth Annual TA Conference in September was attended by over 300 TAs — which is only 125 less than the number of lunches consumed! The rate of attendance set a record high for the conference.

Several possible changes in the format of the conference have been suggested, and the TA Training Program has established a Steering Committee to help evaluate the proposed changes. Under the present format, the morning of the conference includes a general welcoming session, a multi-media presentation and small group discussions of concerns common to all TAs. After lunch, two workshops afford an opportunity for both new and experienced TAs to address more specific problems.

The Steering Committee will meet once in the Winter Quarter and twice in the Spring Quarter to consider ways of improving the conference. If you are interested in serving on the committee, please call Larry Loeher or Cathy Enderton at 825-9269 for more information. □

SURVEY ON EVALUATIONS

End-of-quarter student evaluations have a mixed function. They not only provide feedback from students regarding the effectiveness of teaching, but they may be used administratively to judge the performance of TAs. If you have any doubt as to the utility or validity of these evaluations, the Office of Instructional Development has good news for you. Early in Winter Quarter 1979 most teaching assistants will receive a questionnaire on the subject of evaluations. You will be asked how the evaluations are used in your department, how they **ought** to be used and what you consider to be the characteristics of a good evaluation form. This is the second part of a three-part survey (faculty have already responded, and undergraduates will be sampled later) which will result in a modification and expansion of evaluation procedures to provide speedier and more credible diagnostic information on teaching performance. □

SELF EVALUATION THROUGH VIDEOTAPE

Any TA on campus can have his or her class videotaped by the TA Training Program. We recognize the value of being able to observe your own classroom performance as a means of improving the quality of your teaching. Therefore we offer this service without charge to any TA with regular classroom responsibilities.

The procedure is simple. For departments with TA Consultants, please make arrangements through them. TAs from other departments may contact us directly at 825-9269. Requests should be made at least one week in advance (schedules can get crowded) and should include the following information: date of taping or playback, room and building, time, department, and the name and phone number of the person requesting the service. We will then make the necessary reservations and will call you back after confirming the date.

Videotapes are provided as loans by the TA Training Program and can be kept for as long as one quarter, although because of demand, we prefer to have them returned sooner. After recording, the tape is left in the possession of the TA who was recorded. It is then the TA's responsibility to return the tape to the TA Training Program (124A Royce Hall) or, if the performance was so exemplary that he or she wants to keep it forever, to replace the tape.

Tapes cannot be used for personnel matters, and a signed release form must be filed with the TA Training Program if the tape is to be shown to others without the TA present or if it is to be retained for more than one quarter by the department.

Playback facilities for the videotapes are available at three campus locations: the Video Learning Lab in 170 Royce Hall, Audio Visual Services in 290 Powell Library and the Biomedical Library (9th stack level in the large reading room).

TA Consultants can help review the classroom effectiveness of TAs, and/or feedback can be provided by the TA Training Program. A self-evaluation form for personal viewing is also available. TAs who have used videotaping generally agree that it is difficult to surmount the anxiety of being recorded, but that the opportunity to observe themselves with the dynamics of the classroom is one of the most helpful experiences they have had. □

the TA at UCLA NEWSLETTER

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Edited by:
Larry Loeher, *Program Coordinator*
Cathy Enderton, *Assistant Coordinator*
Leann Hennig, *Editorial Assistant*

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the TA at UCLA NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 3 April 1979

WRITING SEMINAR FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE TAs

Social science TAs concerned about writing problems — their students' and their own — may enroll this Spring in a 4-unit (Pass/Not Pass) seminar, CED 185B (Prose Style for TAs in the Social Sciences). The class, sponsored by the Council on Educational Development and taught by Dr. Carol Hartzog of the English Department, will meet Thursdays from 9 am to 12 noon in 162 Dodd Hall.

This workshop in analyzing and revising prose will help TAs teach and evaluate writing — and write well themselves. After reading Richard Lanham's new book, *Revising Prose*, TAs will apply its principles and methods to their own fields, analyzing selected texts, articles, dissertations, seminar papers, essays and exams.

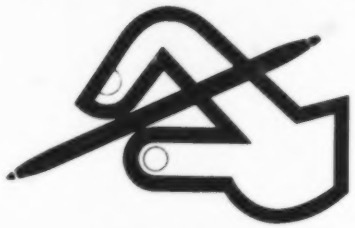
For more information, contact CED (55467) or Carol Hartzog (54173). To register, see pages 58-59 in the Spring *Schedule of Classes*. □

POWER STEERING FOR TA CONFERENCE

The Sixth Annual TA Conference will be held on September 19, 1979. Plans are currently being formulated by a "high-powered" Steering Committee composed of Joe Beaton, Geography; David Kay, Computer Science; Carol MacKay, English; Mike Moore, English; Bob Murphy, Biology; and Rosemarie Szostak, Chemistry. The committee intends to upgrade the existing format of the conference and make it more useful and appealing to experienced TAs.

The Steering Committee is also searching for potential group leaders for the next conference. If you are interested in the job (which carries a $50 stipend), contact either the TA Training Program at ext 59269 or give your name to one of the Steering Committee members. □

In this issue:



Writing

WRP GETS TOGETHER

On April 21 and 22 last year, nearly 100 people from all UCLA departments sat down together to talk about writing. Since then, some of them have cooperated on ways to deal with student writing problems, and the administration has taken action on the advice the conference offered.

The conference was organized by the UCLA Writing Research Project. It was one of two major projects the WRP carried out during the 1977-78 academic year. The other was a two-quarter comparison study of instructional effectiveness in Subject A and English 3.

The UCLA Writing Research Project is funded and encouraged by Associate Vice Chancellor J.C. Ries, Office of Undergraduate Affairs.

After the April conference, a network was set up to facilitate communication among those interested in writing. A network directory was sent to all who participated in the conference. It lists names of those willing to help with writing problems in other disciplines and the kinds of help they offer. To get a copy, please call ext 57744. □

FRESHMAN SUMMER PROGRAM

During the last two summers, over 1000 entering freshmen have received six intensive weeks of basic writing or basic mathematics instruction through UCLA's Freshman Summer Program (FSP). Students are selected on the basis of SAT and diagnostic scores and placed in either a mathematics or English program, both programs including breadth courses, reading/study skills workshops, tutorials, and advising and counseling.

The FSP English program has encouraged a good deal of instructional experimentation with adjunct courses (e.g., five Subject A sections attached to one Psychology 10 breadth course); workshop, small group and tutorial alternatives to lectures; reading programs combined with basic writing instruction, etc. Some of these experiments, most notably adjunct courses, are now being replicated in regular session.

FSP is jointly funded and coordinated by Undergraduate Affairs, Academic Services, Extended Studies and AAP and is staffed with instructors and apprentice personnel from appropriate departments. □

IF YOU'VE EVER BEEN IN PICTURES...

The preparation for our next issue — on the subject of videotape — reminds us that all videotapes checked out in Fall and/or Winter Quarters from the TA Training Program must be returned to 124A Royce Hall before April 16th. Otherwise we will assume you intend to buy a replacement tape, and we'd like to avoid having any $27 misunderstandings. Bring them in and we'll check you off the list! □

WHAT, ME WRITE?

A SERMON FOR SOUTH CAMPUS

Marshall McLuhan was wrong. The Western world had not grown beyond the Gutenberg syndrome and become a global village united by electronic communication. The total amount of communication has indeed multiplied — but an enormous amount of the increase is in writing. The refusal of writing to gracefully fade away before the audio-visual advance is bad news for those who chose their careers because they preferred facts to words. Having completed writing requirements with freshman English, they thought, they now find themselves as TAs and prospective researchers facing writing as a professional necessity.

The great explosion in writing has happened in the sciences. Check the number of scientific journals founded in the last twenty years. A discipline used to have one or two journals; now there are journals for subdisciplines and even for divisions of those. Publication in those journals concerns only academics, but the prospective engineer or chemist cannot comfort himself that he isn't going to be a professor and won't need to produce papers for promotion. On the contrary, the largest single product of any company concerned with production and development is written material — communication to colleagues, reports for the records, explanations to clients, presentations to management. Every phone call for information is supported by a written memo. Ironically, only one professional group escapes the burden of reports, proposals and memos — public schoolteachers.

Most on-the-job writing could be classified as technical writing, but a completely new genre has also arisen, one that did not exist fifty years ago: writing which explains complex technology to decisionmakers. These decisionmakers — administrators in industry, business and government — depend on experts for clear explanations they can understand. Scientific and technological experts must therefore possess exceptional expository skills.

Their acquisition is hampered by misunderstandings about writing. When people from South Campus complain about the quality of student writing (as they did last April at the UCLA Writing Research Project's Conference on Campus Writing), their complaints focus on two kinds of problems: students make spelling, punctuation and grammar errors; students can't organize a paper logically. Now the first of these complaints is not exactly trivial, but it is easily remedied — if teaching personnel, professors and TAs alike, will cooperate. There is no question that expertise in English is necessary, because the teachers recognize the errors. They simply have to make clear to students that such errors will not be overlooked. Students now argue that they can't be penalized in other classes for mistakes in spelling and grammar: "this isn't an English course." But all faculty are teachers of writing if they demand writing. A united front would bring spectacular improvement in a quarter, for errors of this kind are usually produced only by carelessness and poor proofreading.

TO HELP WRITE RIGHT

Do we need to plug *Righting Writing* again? Like chicken soup, it couldn't hurt, so be advised that the English Department at UCLA has provided an effective tool "to help students and teachers in 'righting' the writing they work with." *Righting Writing: A Guide to Composition* by Carol MacKay and Patricia Taylor is a booklet intended to demonstrate how writing may be improved and corrected. It is available at the ASUCLA Bookstore for $0.75. □

Logical organization and effective presentation, on the other hand, go to the heart of writing. These rhetorical skills are the ones demanded for successful writing in the professions. But the rewards of learning to write effectively are not superficial, not simply a matter of career advancement. Writing is a cognitive process. It does not report a pre-linguistic reality, but shapes it. It is profoundly true that you cannot tell what you think until you see it in words. Thinking is spatial, but writing is a linear and sequential medium. The imposition of this single dimension onto simultaneous ideas forces them into a relationship. If the writer is not in control of his organization, his reader will impose an order — the wrong one, for people read with built-in expectations. So the scientific writer cannot simply record his facts and expect them to have the impact he wants. He must understand them, and writing provides the best method of doing so.

Remedies for the rhetorical problem? Ideally, good adjunct courses which help students with writing assigned in technical and professional courses. UCLA's Lower Division Program has offered this kind of instruction since 1974. Students earn English 3 credit by writing papers for psychology, philosophy, sociology and history components. The University of Michigan has an adjunct program of gigantic proportions — a Department of Humanities in the College of Engineering. UCLA is beginning to develop adjunct courses as part of Vice Chancellor William D. Schaefer's new emphasis on writing. Technical writing courses will help, but they're less useful isolated from "real" writing. Workshops helping writers to revise current assignments are popular in research and government organizations, which find their editors swamped with writing in need of much more than editorial attention. If nothing else is available, share your own writing with colleagues in informal workshops. And take time to correct students' writing in section. Above all, never expect to write anything in a single shot. Writing is rewriting.

Here are some articles and books which will help:

Clapp, Edwin. "Why the Devil Don't You Teach Freshmen to Write?", *Saturday Review*, 48, pt. 1, January-March 1965, 63-93. Very illuminating on the two complaints I mentioned. Note the date.

Ehrlich and Murphy. *A Concise Index to English* (McGraw-Hill, 1974). A simple alphabetical reference book (cheap, too) for all mechanical problems. Takes care of the first complaint.

Mathes, J.C. and Dwight Stevenson. *Designing Technical Reports* (Bobbs-Merrill, 1976). The best technical writing text I know, with good examples.

Technical Communication, quarterly journal of the Society for Technical Communication. The Society will hold its 26th International Technical Communications Conference in Los Angeles, May 16-19, 1979. □

— Ruth Mitchell

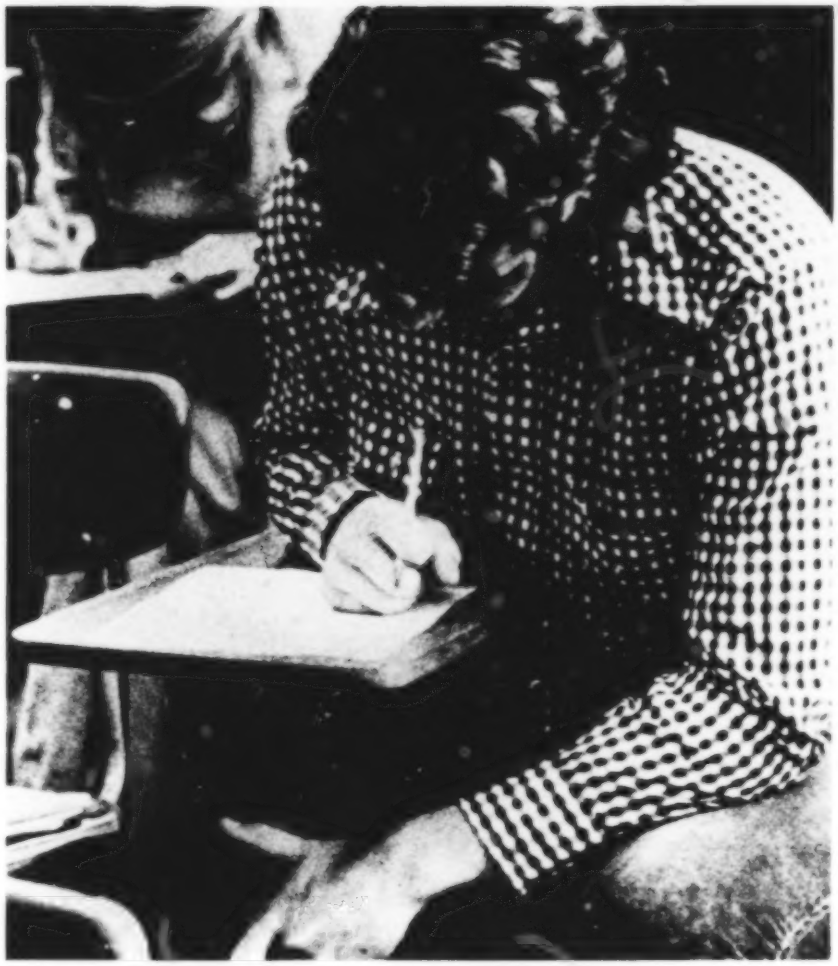
WRITING ANXIETY

A student seeks advice during your office hours. He's uneasy about the upcoming midterm or final, or writing the course term paper. He recounts to you his unsuccessful writing experiences, his difficulties with papers and exams in other classes, or his recurring nightmare of staring at a blank piece of paper, unable to write the first word. What, he asks you, can he do? And what, you ask yourself, can you tell him? For your student is almost a classic case of writing anxiety.

Writing anxiety — simply, a fear of writing — has been a concern of Morris Holland, lecturer in Psychology, for some time. It is also the concern of many TAs who have seen their students "freeze" on an essay exam or agonize about writing a paper that they have thoroughly researched. Dr. Holland's study of student writing at UCLA posits an explanation for this writing anxiety phenomenon; he has also devised a few techniques that TAs could employ to lessen their students' tension about writing.

In the writing anxiety cycle, the anxious student has experienced previous unpleasant, stressful and (in terms of grades) unrewarding writing experiences. Remembering these experiences, he practices "writing avoidance" — he avoids any extracurricular writing, avoids writing classes, delays taking required composition courses and chooses a major where he perceives little need for writing. However, when he finds himself in a position where writing is unavoidable, he faces "cognitive disruption" — his sweaty palms, erratic breathing and muscular tension break his concentration, and his confidence is shaken by memories of previous writing disasters or his uncertainty about what is expected of him. Since both "avoidance" and "disruption" are likely to affect the student's performance, each writing situation becomes a negative experience, which in turn enforces the writer's anxieties.

In this self-perpetuating cycle, the TA's intervention is crucial. He can, either in individual conferences or in group paper-writing or exam-taking strategy sessions, counteract the students' tension by explaining how they can relax in the writing act. The TA can combat the students' cognitive disruption by urging them to control negative thoughts about their writing ability and by initiating positive writing



experiences. In short, the TA can help to create a good environment for his student writers — an environment which they can learn to recreate for themselves.

One way the TA can give the students a positive writing experience is with some free-writing exercises — that is non-evaluated writing. The TA can also make a special effort to clarify paper topics and his expectations on exam responses, so that the students have a clear idea of what is being expected of them and the bases on which they will be evaluated. In the preparation of a long paper, the TA can provide the right kind of guidance for students. Dr. Holland suggests that too often students confront the huge assignment — the complete paper — rather than breaking down and carefully examining the writing process. How does one eat an elephant? The only answer — in small bites — is the solution most workable for anxious writers. If, therefore, students know the right steps to take in the right sequence, they will see the writing task as a series of manageable steps, not an impossible leap from blank paper to completed term paper. The TA can point the student toward this kind of sequencing.

Forms of cognitive behavior modification — the use of relaxation, for example — have been used successfully in other kinds of stress situations; little work, however, has been done with the stress situation that faces many college students — writing anxiety. Dr. Holland's work in this area is moving closer to understanding this problem; his recommendations to TAs here reflect some remedies that his work has suggested and which TAs may consider implementing.

Dr. Holland's *Studies of Students in UCLA's Composition Courses: A Final Report* will be circulating on campus sometime in March. Anyone interested in reading it might contact the TA Training Program for access to a copy.

— Pat Caldwell

DON'T BLAME US!

Once I visited my parents' home at a time when it was filled with university, junior college, high school and elementary teachers. After dinner, one of the university professors sat back and said, "I can't stand the quality of student writing." He turned to a high school teacher and asked, "What are you doing in the high schools? Evidently you are not teaching them anything, because they can't write."

The high school teacher turned to a junior high teacher and passed the question on: "What are *you* doing? By the time they get to high school it's too late." And the junior high teacher turned to an elementary teacher and said, "By the time they get out of elementary school, they can't write; junior high is a place to teach them other skills."

The elementary teacher said, "If you knew what went on at home, with the parents and TV and all, you'd understand." Then we brought my grandparents in from the kitchen, and they said, "Don't blame us — we were against the me: !age in the first place!" □

— Novelist Peter Beagle, as told to a Writing Project workshop at UCSC

BEHIND THE LSC DOOR

The Learning Skills Center continues to be the obvious recourse for students having difficulty with their studies. Yet few TAs are aware of the services LSC has to offer. Within the context of writing, there are three basic formats of assistance: a self-paced laboratory, workshops and individual appointments.

The self-paced laboratory, a relatively new operation, is explicitly for students capable of a self-help program. An initial half-hour interview with a counselor (the general starting point for all students who come to the LSC) helps direct students into the laboratory. Special programs have been designed for use in the lab, allowing students an opportunity to refine newly acquired skills or to refresh previously learned ones. The flexibility of the program also minimizes schedule conflicts for most students. Subsequent follow-up interviews are conducted to facilitate the student's progress with the mechanics of writing.

Workshops are more regularly scheduled and cover such areas as: Basic Writing, Preparation For and Writing Midterm and Final Essay Exams, and Writing for University Courses.

Individual appointments, usually dealing with particular assignments, provide a third avenue for help. Of all the appointments at the LSC, about 49% are accounted for by writing problems — with a tremendous load appearing at the end of each quarter. It would be advantageous to everyone if TAs could identify students with writing problems at the outset of the quarter and urge them to seek help early.

Students often arrive at the Learning Skills Center unable to get started on an assignment or at a loss to explain the low evaluation they have received on a paper. Some of the problems are created by muddled assignments or the lack of structured criticism with an explicit evaluation of the student's writing. TAs can facilitate matters by formulating precise assignments and by indicating how and where writing problems are detracting from the student's work. (LSC counselors are also available to TAs who wish to acquire these skills.) The student can then seek specific writing help from the LSC counselors. Marcella Graffin, Dean of the Learning Skills Center, emphasizes that counselors do not act as an editing service, but have as their main goal helping students work with the structure and needs of their assignments. □

WRITING

For further reference, several excellent style guides are available — and we even provide the call numbers!!

Conference of Biological Editors. *The Style Manual for Biological Journals*, Washington, D.C.: American Institute of Biological Sciences, 1960 (Z, 250.6, B5C7)

Lester, James D. *Writing Research Papers: A Complete Guide*, Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1976 (LB, 2369, L567w)

McCoy, F.N. *Researching and Writing in History*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974 (LB, 2369, M137r)

Trelease, Sam. *How to Write Scientific and Technical Papers*, Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1969 (PE, 1475, T71)

Zinsser, William. *On Writing Well: An Informal Guide to Writing Nonfiction*, New York: Harper and Row, 1976 (PE, 1429, 266o) □

Even at school, I found that if I read aloud, to them, the papers of some of my friends who were having trouble with English, they could often see their own mistakes and bad writing. But I could never get them to read their own papers, carefully, as if they were seeing them for the first time. It took me years to find out, or guess why not. They had written those papers for someone else, not for themselves. They were a kind of excreta, which they wanted to be rid of, done with. It is probably true of many students that when they have struggled and sweated to the end of a paper, they not only are bored with it, they actively hate it, and don't want to have to look at it again. In this frame of mind, how can they learn from what they have written, or from what we have written about what they have written?

— John Holt, *What Do I Do Monday?*

WHAT STUDENTS DON'T REALIZE (ABOUT WRITING)

The whole process of writing is mystifying to many, if not most, students. Operating from the belief that what my students don't known *can* hurt them, I've offered my classes some generalizations about academic writing that most of them find surprising.

Students don't realize —

— That writers rewrite — many times!

— That published articles are often proved wrong, unconvincing or badly written; not everything that's published (or even part of our required reading) is a model of good prose.

— That not all writing has to be the conclusion of a process; writing often represents the writer's present position on a problem.

— That not all writing represents a creative new position on a problem.

— That university and college faculty often consult colleagues about first, second and third drafts of essays, while students almost always work in isolation from one another.

— That each field has some idiosyncratic stylistic demands with which writers should be familiar, and students can discuss these with their professors in various disciplines.

— That most writers write for a specific audience.

— That what they (students) have to say is of value.

— That writing is a revealing expression of what they have learned during the quarter.

— That criticism of their papers is not criticism of them as people. □

— Don Rothman

POLI SCI 1 ADJUNCT COURSE: WINTER 79

Carol Hartzog, English Department Lecturer, taught an adjunct composition course in parallel with Political Science 1 (taught by Professor Leonard Freedman). Students fulfilled the English 3 requirement by enrolling in one of Carol's three sections. They received composition training while preparing the required papers for Poli Sci 1. Although the classes were independently graded, Carol and the Poli Sci 1 TAs cooperated on topic selection and revision of papers. An evaluation component will test whether composition instruction helps with students' mastery of the course material. □

SEVEN PHILOSOPHIES OF WRITING

Pat Taylor, the TA Consultant for English, asks her TAs to develop individually their own philosophy of composition. She provides the following imaginary conversation to stimulate their thinking:

Writing Teacher #1: Writing is discovery. The student learns by practice his own potential, the way language works for him, how to make it meaningful to others. My aim in teaching is to give him stimulating projects, encourage his self-confidence, allow him freedom. I assign freewriting, let my students help design the course, have them share papers.

Teacher #2: Nonsense. Writing is not something he's learning anew. Assume he's read and written for at least thirteen years and build from there. Writing is not narcissistic expression, but a reaching out to others. Writing is rhetoric — the attempt to persuade others. Given a mighty purpose, a student will pick up the rest of it. . . My class gets tools for work in the real world.

Teacher #3: This is silly. How can your student convince someone when he has no ideas to begin with. Kids today spout only the cliches floating around. They need disciplined minds. Writing is thinking. Thinking, for me, is abstracting meaning from the welter of events and objects surrounding us. My class learns to build from chaos, significant themes, orderly paragraphs. We work with raw data, newspaper articles, oral arguments. They learn how to think!

Teacher #4: All this sounds fine theoretically, but we're not teaching scholars hungry for learning. Our freshmen are interested in relationships, in themselves and in not much else. Let's start where they are. They want esteem and respect. Give them a chance to show off. Teach style, style, style. Let them feel the thrill of their own pyrotechnics. Have them learn the way Shakespeare and Chaucer probably learned — by imitating purple passages and then outdoing them. They don't have original ideas. They do know words and can let words play with words until *how* something is said matters.

Teacher #5: If we had all theater arts majors, your idea would be fine. My jocks won't like it. We're here to teach *college* writing. First, writing means reading, assimilating good models and good ideas. Then, it means using the printed page to sum up, to judge, to integrate into one's own ideas. Let's acquaint our students with the writing they must do in college — historical writing, biological, psychological and philosophical writing. They will learn that writing is also a unifying agent in their lives — gathering fragments and facts into a whole.

Teacher #6: None of this is relevant to my class here and now. I believe I must focus on the writing of my students now. Last quarter's class was dull but competent. This quarter's is bright but sloppy. I'm here to help them improve. We teach them that a writer must fit his approach to suit his subject. Well, a teacher has to do the same thing. I select topics and techniques that will help them solve the problems most obvious in their writing.

Teacher #7: Sorry, writing cannot be taught. If it could be taught, college English teachers would be the last people to teach it, since they're primarily henchpersons of the capitalistic, bureaucratic power structure that created the modern university in the image of a labor-alienated factory. English teachers would therefore do best to forget "writing" — the collection of abstract problems and platitudes they relentlessly rehash — and turn to politics. □

Here and there a touch of good grammar for picturesqueness.

— Mark Twain

PROPHYLACTIC ASSIGNMENTS

A pedagogical parable:

Once upon a time last year, two TAs led the discussion sections for an overenrolled biology course. The professor required research papers from all students, and naturally the responsibility for assigning and evaluating the essays fell upon our heroes. As we have said, the TAs had divided the horde of underclassmen as Moses the Red Sea, but even so, as the first TA scanned the vast expanse of his discussion section, he perceived that there were far too many students in his charge considering how much work of his own had to be completed that quarter. Remembering to look out for number one, knowing how many grinding hours of grading lay ahead, this TA decided to waste no more time than necessary. Accordingly, he rose up before his charges and proclaimed, "Write a four- to five-page library paper on something we're studying this quarter. Due tenth week." And having spoken, he returned to his research.

The second TA, a wily and worldly-wise herpetologist, equally dismayed by the overload of undergraduates, also remembered to look out for number one. And so, biting down hard on his test tube holder (no bullets being available), he dittoed an assignment sheet for his students. The sheet not only established the assignment's parameters (including sample topics) but also explained the desired format for papers and the TA's criteria for grading. After distributing this detailed assignment sheet and setting aside class time to solicit questions concerning it, the second TA returned to his research.

Came the tenth week and the flood of papers. Ironically, the first TA had to spend fully half again as much time wading through the essays as the second TA did. In fact, the first TA almost drowned in the deluge of formless, sloppily written, undocumented essays, each on a different, often poorly defined if not chaotic, topic. The second TA received better focused, more conscientiously written essays — and far fewer unwelcome surprises. His students had known what was expected of them. Odds are that this partially accounted for the second TA's higher student evaluation scores.

The moral: any TA can influence greatly the quality of student writing merely by the care he or she takes in making assignments. The following suggestions for more influential assignment-making were distilled from a blend of composition texts, discussions with TAs from various departments and forty undergraduate essays written under the rubric of "My Most and Least Productive Writing Experiences."

I. Before you make the first assignment:

a. Establish a clear policy concerning due dates and late papers.

b. This may seem obvious, but especially if you are dealing with freshmen, point out that they are writing for an audience, and not merely for self-expression; that is, grades will be awarded purely on the basis of what is down on paper, not what is reputedly in their heads. Inform the student that he will profit from rereading all essays to make sure that he has covered the material thoroughly and presented it clearly. You, too, will profit.

c. Explain plagiarism and specify the sort of documentation you require on take-home papers. This may prevent much tribulation later in the quarter.

II. Making the assignment:

a. Effective assignments possess two cardinal virtues: clarity and specificity. In large classes or exam situations especially, any ambiguity will be exploited, any conceivable wrong turn taken. Establish firm, detailed guidelines for both the content and format of the essays.

Forty of my students, discussing their worst assignments ever, agreed unanimously that nothing proves more disheartening, or more irritating, than a vague assignment. Accordingly, time spent clarifying an assignment ultimately saves time in two ways. It reduces the percentage of tangent-riding, superfluous and/or confusing prose you will be confronting; few tasks consume more time than hacking through a "birdshot-and-kitchen-sink" essay trying to locate correct answers in the verbal underbrush. Unambiguous assignments also save angry office hours spent justifying a "D" to the student who responded to your question on theories of mass extinction with five hundred words on the decline of Catholicism.

Two corollaries for take-home assignments: 1) set aside class time to discuss assignments — encourage questions and answer them sympathetically; 2) type all assignments, ditto/xerox and distribute them, because oral assignments invite chaos.

b. Make grading criteria explicit in advance. Few people like working in the dark. For that matter, not everyone likes working; many students periodically need to be informed that conscientiousness is worth their while. If you want well-organized essays, announce that you will take organization into account when grading. This may be the surest way of combating academic entropy. And when my students wrote about their worst writing experiences, they ranked murky grading standards up there with vague or misleading assignments as a major cause of dissatisfaction. The clearer the standards, the less student confusion and resentment, the fewer office hour showdowns.

And most importantly, the better the papers. □

— Michael Moore, English

Writing has never been highly regarded by economists. A very eminent economist once argued that good writing ought to be discouraged on the grounds that it might attract more attention to the writer's ideas than their intrinsic intellectual value merited. It shows.

— Elisabeth Allison, "Economics: How to Enjoy the Experience of Reading It," *Harvard Magazine*, March-April 1979, page 64. □

HOLISTIC READINGS: BEYOND THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

Whether or not we knew it at the time, most of us have had at least one of our exams or papers evaluated holistically. Fast becoming a trendy concept, "holism" simply stresses the organic interrelations of parts and their wholes, and for teachers and test administrators that means reading essays and assessing them for their overall quality, without marking individual strengths or failings. These readings are hardly impressionistic in the idiosyncratic sense of the word; rather they represent agreed-upon interpretations of the scoring guide drawn up by a group of readers or their representatives.

The number of student essays and the use to which the scores are finally put determine the logistics of a specific reading session. Thus the Educational Testing Service, because it is a national clearinghouse responsible for measuring fulfillment of college course requirements, must set up a complex system, ranging from thorough training of readers to a means of resolving highly discrepant scores (the principle of all holistic systems is that each essay be read at least twice; without stopping to mark papers, readers learn to read quickly yet proficiently). Here at UCLA the Subject A Department has developed a similar system on a smaller scale, using it not only for placement but for mid-terms and finals as well.

The key to a successful reading session lies within the rubric, which sets out guidelines for assigning numerical scores to essays on a specific topic. Before the actual scoring begins, the participants read and rate a small sample of papers, working toward consensus and testing the assignment's range; this process, called norming, may need to be repeated several times during a grading session to ensure continued reliability. Each essay is then read and scored by two different readers who do not see each other's scores, and a table leader allots essays with significantly divergent scores (say, a 2 and a 5 on a 1-6 scale) to a third or possibly fourth reader.

For any department that asks its students to write essays, either prepared or impromptu, there are several advantages to occasional holistic readings. Discovering or working out departmental cohesion on a given course requirement constitutes the main benefit — and periodic realignments can be reassuring. From the student's viewpoint reactions may be mixed, however. Certainly getting back an exam with no corrections or comments on it does not seem very constructive (the instructor can partially remedy this situation by distributing descriptions of the scoring guide), but knowing that a score represents the agreement of at least two faculty members can give the student more confidence in the grading system.

Admittedly, instituting holistic scoring presents some practical problems. Reading sessions are time-consuming and tiring, particularly so when they occur at periods that induce extra stress in the readers as well as the students. TAs, ourselves graduate students with our own pressures to finish papers and take exams, understandably resist efforts to infringe upon our valuable time during final exam week. Recognizing this situation, a wise department will ask its TAs to engage in limited holistic readings at such periods, to read only one of several essay questions holistically, for instance. Another alternative is to arrange for additional pay for extended service — and to

- make the reading voluntary.

Looking over a TA's career, I would most strongly recommend holistic reading sessions during the training period that precedes actual teaching or accompanies the first quarter's teaching experience. At these stages, the newly appointed TA is learning how to read essays critically and is trying to adapt to departmental grading standards, and collective reading sessions with his peers can provide a fruitful forum for discussing course goals and expectations. Conducted by a TA Consultant or some other departmental representative, these sessions can also address such key issues as the interrelationship of content and form and what constitutes the basic pass/fail line. Carefully used, not abused, holistic reading of essays is another tool toward making us all better teachers.

NOTE: Interested TAs will find a useful resource on this topic in Paul Diederich's *Measuring Growth in English* (Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1974). □

— Carol MacKay, English

TRICKS FOR THE TA

Your problem is this: someone turns in 5 pages of styleless gobbledygook entitled "The Sociology of Crabgrass." Do you let the style offend you and assign an "F," or do you return the paper for revision? And if you return it for revision, what, for god's sake, do you tell the student to revise?

R.A. Lanham (Professor of English, UCLA) assists the TA with a few suggestions.

First, circle the prepositions. Most rhythmless, run-on sentences, you'll find, run on strings of prepositional phrases. Practice with this one: "In an ongoing study of wheat farming in India, researchers are in the process of demonstrating that the presence of sacred cows in large numbers on the properties of peasant farmers is a significant factor in the growth of crabgrass on the arable land in question." Hear how the rhythm thumpity-thumps from one preposition to the next? A train ride couldn't put you to sleep faster. Remedy: don't string prepositional phrases together. No more than two in a row, if you can help it. A first-stage revision might go like this: "A study of Indian wheat farming is demonstrating that sacred cows are a significant factor in the growth of crabgrass." Better, because we've eliminated ten thumpity-thumping prepositional phrases. But still dead. Dead as sacred cow-dung. Look at the verbs: lifeless forms of "to be," the weakest verb the student could find. Undergraduates shy away from active verbs; they sound too assertive. So circle the forms of "to be," too, and tell your student to rewrite his essay, using strong, active verbs. The exercise is easier (and more fun) than you imagine. Ask yourself, "Where's the action?" Our example buries it in "growth."

The writer has turned a nice strong verb ("grows") into a noun. Revised, with action resurrected, we might have: "Crabgrass grows where sacred animals leave holy relics on the ground."

Finally, tell your student to vary sentence length, breaking endless shopping-bag sentences into shorter, more rhythmic units.

For more such advice (for your own prose, too) look at R.A. Lanham's *Revising Prose*. Paperback, cheap and available at the Students' Store! □

— Robert Byrnes, English

A COURSE ON DISCOURSE

Mike Rose, Coordinator of Curriculum and Instruction for the Freshman Summer Program and a member of the UCLA Writing Research Project, has developed a writing curriculum based on the five most used types of university discourse. These types are: serial presentation, classification, compare/contrast, synthesis and analysis. Using insights from cognitive psychology, Mike has arranged the discourse types into a hierarchy, so that a composition course can proceed from the fundamental to the more sophisticated type in incremental steps. The course has provided the basis for some Freshman Summer Program composition courses.

The curriculum is introduced to prospective TAs in English 275, the required training course for English Department composition TAs, taught this year by Ruth Mitchell, Adjunct Assistant Professor in the English Department and also a member of the UCLA Writing Research Project. English 275 students practice each type of discourse in assignments based on theoretical readings about composition, rhetoric and style. □

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the TA at UCLA NEWSLETTER

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Cathy Enderton, *Assistant Coordinator*
Leann Hennig, *Editorial Assistant*

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Another publication we owe thanks is UCLA's own *Writing Conference Newsletter* from which we "borrowed" several items. The next issue of the newsletter should appear early in Spring Quarter. If you would like a copy or have news or ideas to share with others interested in writing, call the Writing Research Project at ext 57744 (and if the Learning Skills Center should answer, don't hang up).

Many people helped to put this pleasantly edit-free issue together; our thanks and your appreciation should go to **Joe Beaton, Bob Byrnes, Pat Caldwell, Marcella Graffin, Morris Holland, Carol MacKay, Ruth Mitchell, Michael Moore, Mike Rose, John Schacher, Pat Taylor** and our own exclusive photographer, **Harold Bogus.** □

SAME LANGUAGE, DIFFERENT PROCESS

Nancy Sommers of Oklahoma University has investigated the differences in attitude to revision between student writers and experienced writers. Eight of each classification wrote three essays and revised them. Sommers examined the 24 protocols and also interviewed the writers.

Student writers don't use the words "revision" and "rewriting." Instead, they talk about "scratching out" or "marking out," because they work only on a lexical level. They work linearly and depend on inspiration. Once the writing is on paper, only repeated words need to be changed, they think.

Experienced writers used a recursive, cyclical model of writing as they rewrote and reshaped. They went far beyond lexical substitution, guided by the need to resolve dissonances in the total unit of composition. □

the TA at UCLA NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 5 April 1980

PERFORMANCE ANXIETY IN STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

Elsewhere in this issue, Nancy Nowik describes some of her work with students who suffer painful anxiety at the prospect of speaking up in the classroom. Such students comprise one group, or minority, who powerfully fear the consequences of exposing their thoughts to the possible judgment of their teachers and peers. Another, similar, minority are students with painful anxiety at the prospect of taking examinations. Here again the "fear of performing" proves agonizing and crippling. Their fears, nurtured by previous educational or personal experiences, are often intensified by what happens in their college courses. We teachers, often unwittingly, in the name of standards and the educational system and our way of doing things, blame the victims and go on grinding them up.

It would help us first to understand what is going on in people with performance anxiety. They have adopted a set of beliefs and demands which make sense to them, but which are actually irrational. This set centers around a level of performance they

In this issue:

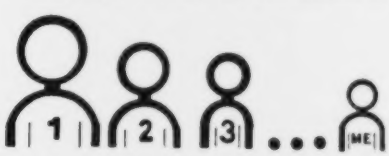
Anxiety

have defined as necessary to achieve, and a catastrophizing of the consequences of not meeting those standards. Those "terrible" consequences are usually to the person's feeling of self-worth, irrationally equated with the success of the discrete performance. "I did not do well at this" becomes "I *am* a failure." Such irrational beliefs, demands, and catastrophizings are learned habits, rehearsed both before and during the performance.

Before: "I'll never make it." "What if he shoots me down?" "It will be awful."

During: "How am I doing?" "I can't make it." "I'm no good." "I can't stand it."

Thus, anxious people anticipate confirmation of their low self-esteem. They label themselves negatively and feel guilty for failure. They *judge* their performance instead of performing — using either their own standards, other people's imagined standards, or



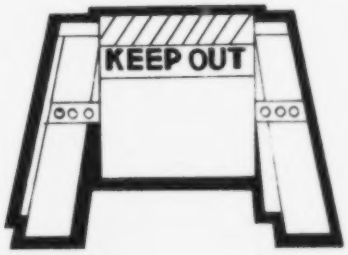
other people's performances as standards. They see themselves as inadequate, and exaggerate the consequences of their failure and others' reactions to it. They expect to fail, and so they do. It is no wonder people block on exams or decide not to speak their ideas. These responses avoid the risk, momentarily reduce the anxiety, and maintain the whole syndrome.

But learned habits can be unlearned; new self-enhancing habits can be learned. Labeling one's self as "an anxious (or shy, or quiet, or...) person" is a cop-out. Beliefs, demands, and catastrophizing habits are no more a part of the self than is one's accent.

Fear of failure will persist until one thinks about the unthinkable and looks clearly at the *precise* consequences of a failure. They are seldom catastrophic; at worst they are very unpleasant, and usually tolerable, even if barely. If something might go wrong, that needn't be fixated on. The demand for being always successful can be challenged: Why must I always win? Precisely what is so bad about making a mistake? Won't I live through it? Isn't it the nature of people to stumble, to make mistakes, throughout life? Why must *I* be so special — either a god or a devil — why can only other people be accepted as fallible? Why is my performance the measure of my worth as a human? Is my worth solely a reflection mirrored in the eyes of others? Is it true that giving up anxiety implies giving up caring? Is there no difference between concern/interest/wanting and fear/guilt/self-downing/demanding? Indeed, some people catastrophize simply *feeling* anxious, and thus start their suffering and blocking

at the mere suggestion of the feared performance. These people would be helped if they stopped labeling their sensations as "fear" or "anxiety" and called them, instead, "excitement." Uncertainty and imperfection are the zestful edge of experience!

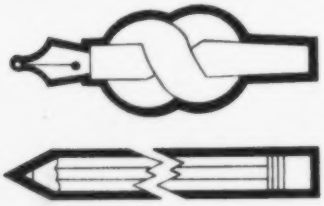
All this is not to say it is easy to replace irrational beliefs and self-destructive habits. It takes much work, practice, and support from the environment. Are we as teachers prepared to help our students overcome their performance anxieties? Or have we similar anxieties ourselves ... not really believing that we and all others are intrinsically worthwhile people whose goal is properly to find joy, satisfaction and fulfillment in life? Do we, ourselves, believe that success and failure are the basis of human worth? If so, we will find thousands of ways to confirm students' self-defeating and potentially fascist view that worth is measured by performance. We will confirm it when we crudely put down a questioner, or when we subtly dismiss a comment; when we hide our own thoughts and feelings lest we be revealed as fallible; when we are judgmental in evaluations; when we one-up and stereotype each other in order to enhance our own self-esteem; when we avoid risk-taking in our own lives and stifle it in others.



A rational concept of our own self-worth will develop as we facilitate similar development in our students. In the process, we will increasingly free our own lives from self-doubts, will contribute to the academic and personal richness of students' lives, and will help to create a world in which people are valued for themselves, not as winners over losers. That kind of world may prove to be worth living in — for ourselves, our students, and our grandchildren.

—Frank C. Andrews
UC Santa Cruz

WRITING ANXIETY



A student seeks advice during your office hours. He's uneasy about the upcoming midterm or final, or writing the course term paper. He recounts to you his unsuccessful writing experiences, his difficulties with papers and exams in other classes, or his recurring nightmare of staring at a blank piece of paper, unable to write the first word. What, he asks you, can he do? And what, you ask yourself, can you tell him? For your student is almost a classic case of writing anxiety.

Writing anxiety — simply, a fear of writing — has been a concern of Morris Holland, lecturer in Psychology, for some time. It is also the concern of many TAs who have seen their students "freeze" on an essay exam or agonize about writing a paper that they have thoroughly researched. Dr. Holland's study of student writing at UCLA posits an explanation for this writing anxiety phenomenon; he has also devised a few techniques that TAs could employ to lessen their students' tension about writing.

In the writing anxiety cycle, the anxious student has experienced previous unpleasant, stressful and (in terms of grades) unrewarding writing experiences. Remembering these experiences, he practices "writing avoidance" — he avoids any extracurricular writing, avoids writing classes, delays taking required composition courses and chooses a major where he perceives little need for writing. However, when he finds himself in a position where writing is unavoidable, he faces "cognitive disruption" — his sweaty palms, erratic breathing and muscular tension break his concentration, and his confidence is shaken by memories of previous writing disasters or his uncertainty about what is expected of him. Since both "avoidance" and "disruption" are likely to affect the student's performance, each writing situation becomes a negative experience, which in turn enforces the writer's anxieties.

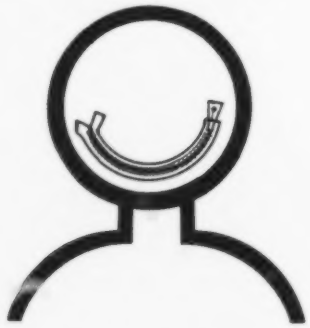
In this self-perpetuating cycle, the TA's intervention is crucial. He can, either in individual conferences or in group paper-writing or exam-taking strategy sessions, counteract the students' tension by explaining how they can relax in the writing act. The TA can combat the students' cognitive disruption by urging them to control negative thoughts about their writing ability and by initiating positive writing experiences. In short, the TA can help to create a good environment for his student writers — an environment which they can learn to recreate for themselves.

One way the TA can give the students a positive writing experience is with some free-writing exercises — that is non-evaluated writing. The TA can also make a special effort to clarify paper topics and his expectations on exam responses, so that the students have a clear idea of what is being expected of them and the bases on which they will be evaluated. In the preparation of a long paper, the TA can provide the right kind of guidance for students. Dr. Holland suggests that too often students confront the huge assignment — the complete paper — rather than breaking down and carefully examining the writing process. How does one eat an elephant? The only answer — in small bites — is the solution most workable for anxious writers. If, therefore, students know the right steps to take in the right sequence, they will see the writing task as a series of manageable steps, not an impossible leap from blank paper to completed term paper. The TA can point the student toward this kind of sequencing.

Forms of cognitive behavior modification — the use of relaxation, for example — have been used successfully in other kinds of stress situations; little work, however, has been done with the stress situation that faces many college students — writing anxiety. Dr. Holland's work in this area is moving closer to understanding this problem; his recommendations to TAs here reflect some remedies that his work has suggested and which TAs may consider implementing.

—Pat Caldwell

WORKING WITH RETICENT STUDENTS



The number one fear of American adults is oral communication. So concluded a nationwide survey published in 1973. Indeed, studies suggest that between 15 and 20 percent of all American college students suffer from "debilitating communication apprehension." And how many of the rest suffer painful difficulty when speaking up in the classroom? Lowered grades, less pleasure from learning, and permanent blocks to performance and social satisfaction are the result.

Speech anxiety, or reticence, in students has been studied since at least 1960, and causes have been attributed by various writers to neurosis, stuttering, schizophrenia, stagefright, speech pathology, physiological defect, learning problems, and even social marginality. Recent studies suggest that reticence should not be diagnosed and treated as a pathology. As a lifetime reticent myself, I choose to view it as the absence of a skill, a skill that can be both taught and learned.

With the advice of counselors, and the support of the Great Lakes Colleges Association, I have offered several Reticent Student Workshops at Denison College during the past few years, using some seemingly threatening techniques. These workshops consist of six or seven sessions for students who repeatedly want to speak up but find they cannot. At the first session, students choose a class in which they want to speak, and they contract to *say something* in it. Anything, even something as low-risk as "Would you please repeat that?" Throughout the workshop we contract for increasingly risky ventures (such as giving personal information, and finally giving personal opinions), and we analyze the feedback people get when they do speak in class. We talk a lot about accepting responsibility for saying something while learning not to expect, or need, positive feedback. We do a lot of role-playing geared to shaking inhibitions and increasing assertiveness.

Midway through the workshop, we move our sessions from the dimly-lit faculty lounge to the cold glare of the classroom. A visiting professor comes to role-play an intimidating bully. The students study some common subject matter in preparation, and are briefed on what to expect. A set of hand signals makes it possible for people to drop out of the argument if they get too nervous or run out of steam. For those who remain in the game, the experience is very intimidating. But by the end of the two hours, most of them are elated. Even granting that the session is staged, they experience real liberation in "talking back."

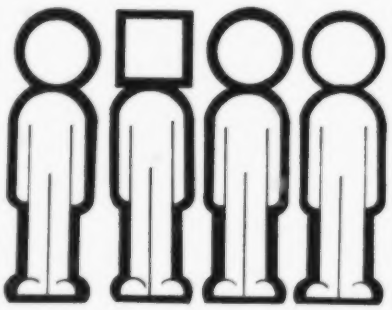
The rest of the sessions involve intimidation exercises using various faculty (especially those with reputations for being intimidating) on topics that lead to easy expression of opinions and values. We also do "listening exercises;" often students don't stay in there because they haven't listened well enough to recall the points of the arguments.

I am convinced that only 75 percent of the problem is the reticent student's; 25 percent of it is ours. The teacher and the classroom atmosphere can work to lessen or increase the student's reticence. Teachers can stop grading on participation; they can provide options for assignments other than formal presentations; they can permit students to choose where they feel comfortable in sitting; they can avoid forcing the involuntary participation caused by calling on reticent students; they can structure the course so students can succeed without extra oral communication.

My students have made these suggestions for teachers: Come to class early and stay late. Dress casually. Know and use students' names. Be enthusiastic. Tell jokes occasionally. Share personal, autobiographical experiences. Sit on the desk, move around, don't stand glued behind the lectern. Encourage conferences, but recognize they might be a real strain. Use first-day introductory exercises; those who talk on the first day are more likely to talk during the term. Give positive feedback whenever it's natural and comfortable — a nod, a *yes*, a *good*, a *you're right*. Recognize reticent students as such — not to be pampered and treated specially, but perhaps to be spoken to outside of class, to be encouraged a bit, to know that they do count and it matters what they say.

Consider the distinction between presenting a challenge and intimidating. In my own fight against reticence, timing was everyting. I could respond well to intimidation when I retained some control, as in the workshops. Or when *I* had chosen the time — when I had decided I was ready to take a risk. Forcing students to participate when they have no choice increases their self-consciousness and inarticulateness.

—Nancy Nowik



The four basic causes of anxiety for most college students are tests, studying, public speaking and dating.

—Daily Bruin

A PLEA FOR ENCOURAGEMENT

Just as teachers can light the path, spark the imagination, or fill a student with wonder, so can they strike students down. Just as they have the power to direct, to judge, to instill morals, and to be taken as models, so can teachers act as snipers from those pedestals we put them on. Sometimes they're like almighty holders of the keys of knowledge — guards at the door to freedom, happiness, and a well-paying job. Sometimes we make them into parent-symbols, and then they can be the most horrible parents in the world.

In the summer when I was fifteen, I took an advanced algebra and trigonometry class at the local high school. One of four women in a class of fifty, I felt awkward and bashful in my changing body. It was the first class I took at high school, and I was worried about being able to handle the subject matter. During a class discussion on logarithms, I realized I didn't know what logarithms were. Confused, I squirmed in my seat. Finally I worked up the nerve to say, "But I still don't understand just what a logarithm is." "It's a new form of birth control," snapped the teacher. Roars from the class. Everyone was looking at me. I felt my face get hot. I forced out a self-conscious laugh, trying to disguise the awful feelings churning inside.

The rest of the day was a blank. I heard nothing of the teacher's ensuing explanation of logarithms, and later I received the lowest grade I ever got in high school. It wasn't until I took college chemistry that I was able to overcome my mental block against logarithms.

• • • • •

Later, at UCSC, while waiting for the other students to arrive for a science course discussion section, a classmate and I were commiserating about our similarly low scores on a recent mid-term. My companion was explaining to the professor that even though her father is a professor of the same subject, it somehow had always been her weak point. Relieved, I joined in to explain jokingly that my dad is an electrical engineer, but I'd never done worse than on an electronics test. The professor forced a laugh with us. Later, during the discussion session, I made some stupid mistake that I've since blotted out of my memory. The prof said, "Boy, I can sure see how you did so badly on that test." "I'm sorry," I said, trying to smile. "I'm just really lost with this stuff." Later, as I described the scene to a friend, I wept.

Sometimes I wish I hadn't developed such gracious cover-up tactics. Thinking about it now, I am angry with myself for not saying at times like that, "God dammit, it hurts me when you say that."

• • • • •

"Haven't *you* got any questions?" a professor once asked a shy student in section. "No, I just want to hear from the others," she responded softly. "Oh, so you're here for another free ride, huh?" he boomed. She flushed, looked down at her pencil, and tried to force a grin. I never saw her in section again.

• • • • •

Some people believe that everyone should be exposed to intimidating situations, so that they can toughen up. I admit that this has worked for me on occasion, but usually I wind up resenting the person who was forceful with me; the pain of the memory makes me want to stuff the whole ordeal.

Our familiar California trend of humanistic psychology (*I'm OK You're OK*) seems a much more profitable approach. I remember with happiness the friendly learning experiences that I've had. Those good feelings have set me free to go on to explore and dare on my own.

Granted, teachers are not the only source of bad feelings in the classroom. Students, too, can contribute to a compounding atmosphere of intimidation. To a lecturer, that sea of faces seems to be constantly judging, challenging, demanding perfection. The hurting business, coming from both faculty and students, is destructive to people and to learning, and the incidents have long-lasting effects.

This is a plea from those of us who feel hurt inside. We are thinking people, and we are feeling people. We need love and encouragement, the benefit of doubt, forgiveness, patience, and respect.

—Susan Ferguson
UC Santa Cruz

We have been too long under the spell of the idea of the Gifted Teacher, whose every word or move works miracles in the classroom, for whom everything goes right and nothing goes wrong. This Gifted Teacher is a myth.

—John Holt

MATH-ANXIETY IN *MY* CLASSROOM? WHAT CAN *I* DO ABOUT IT?

Students are constantly subjected to anxiety-prone situations with the causes as varied as the students. Grades — how people feel about them and what they do to get them — are probably the major source of anxiety on a college campus. However, large numbers of people suffer from an additional source of anxiety — *math-anxiety* — not just anxiety about numbers, but anxiety with formulas, graphs, equations and mathematics in general.

People with math-anxiety generally try to avoid doing mathematics, arithmetic and graphical types of work. They skip charts and graphs in

books, they feel a sense of insecurity when encountering numbers, graphs or equations, and they see themselves as math-unable. On the other hand, these people generally see themselves as very able in some other non-quantitative area, and this only heightens their sense of math-anxiety. Both men and women experience math-anxiety, and it is as common in one sex as in the other, although more "socially acceptable" in women than in men. "So," you ask, "what can I do about it in my classroom?"

Your role as a classroom instructor affords many opportunities to help students both with the academic content and with the emotional components of learning. To do this, you must establish a climate — one in which anxieties, fears and the human aspects of learning are addressed and visable. There are four activities you can do as a classroom instructor to establish this climate and thus let your students know that you want to do something about their anxieties. These activities should be done at various times throughout the quarter, whenever appropriate. For some activities, it is important to make them appropriate by simply taking a few minutes and saying, "I want to talk about something which may or may not apply to some or all of you."

Granting Permission

I call this activity "granting permission" because as an instructor you say, "it is alright to be math-anxious. You are not alone, and it is nothing to be ashamed or afraid of. It is a problem you can do something about." Furthermore, you can then share the "math-anxiety bill of rights." (This is shown elsewhere in this newsletter.) Granting permission is important for two reasons. First, from the students' point of view, it tells them that if they suffer from math-anxiety, they are not alone, they can seek help, and they do have rights. Second, and maybe even more important, it tells them *you* as the instructor accept them and are aware that such problems exist, and that it is alright.

Self-Disclosure

By self-disclosure, I mean telling your students about your feelings and your difficulties with the material, and if you are a math-anxious person, telling them about your math-anxiety. You will not believe the bond this establishes with your class. Everyone, even the brightest among us, has had some difficulty with some material at one time or another. As classroom instructors, we are seen as successful, knowledgeable, and above anxiety and stress. Little do the students know that we too are human and how hard we all had to struggle, so *let them know.*

Modeling the Process

Math-anxious students need to have success experiences with mathematics. This success must include a reduction in the frustration and sense of helplessness when studying. As a classroom instructor, you can help your students by carefully modeling problem-solving and studying procedures — actually showing your students how to read math-oriented material, how to approach a problem, how to try different problem-solving tactics and how to study for problem-oriented exams. Remember that these skills, regardless of how second nature they are to you, were acquired over time and with many experiences. The math-anxious person may be lacking these experiences and needs to learn new study techniques to deal with the content. For specific suggestions on study skills, you may want to refer to a book such as *How to Study Mathematics, Chemistry, Statistics, and Physics* by Jason L. Frand.

Math-Anxiety Discussion Group

If after "granting permission, self-disclosure, and modeling the process," you find some students very responsive or nodding in agreement, you could say, "why don't those of you who are interested in talking about your math-anxiety come to my office at 1 pm today (or whatever time and day you wish), and let's have a short discussion about math-anxiety." Don't try to be a clinical psychologist. Tell the class you are not a psychologist (unless, of course, you are) and keep the discussion very "factual." Don't let it become a therapy session. You may ask a question like "what do I mean when I say I am math-anxious?" Allow the group to openly and freely discuss the question. Be prompt to direct students to the Psychological and Counseling Services where professional clinical psychologists are available to work with them. (This service is free to all students and TAs.) This kind of group discussion can be extremely useful to students in clarifying their math-anxiety and is a first step to reducing it. I would *not* recommend conducting this activity as a full classroom function as it may make some students extremely uncomfortable and turn out to be counterproductive.

In conclusion, you can make a positive contribution to your students' mental health by allowing them to openly acknowledge their feelings regarding mathematics and by sharing your feelings and insights. Such disclosures will create a teaching/learning environment from which both you and your students will benefit.

—Jason Frand

The first thing people remember about failing at math is that it felt like sudden death.

—Sheila Tobias

Fear cannot be banished, but it can be calm and without panic; and it can be mitigated by reason and evaluation.

—Vannevar Bush

MATH INSTRUCTORS' BILL OF RIGHTS

As a math instructor, I have the right...

1. To pace the instruction at a rate that I judge to be suitable for *most* class members.
2. a. To insist that questions be reasonably specific.
   b. To limit the amount of time spent answering a particular question.
   c. To admit that I don't know all the answers.
3. To expect students to help themselves by doing their homework.
4. To refer students to other sources of help (including their textbooks).
5. To say I have exhausted my resources for helping a student understand.
6. To feel good about myself regardless of my ability to make someone understand.
7. To view myself as capable of teaching math.
8. To evaluate my students and how much they have learned.
9. To relax.
10. To be treated as a competent teacher, with human limitations.
11. To insist that students apply their full abilities despite any dislike they may have for math.
12. To define the student's success according to the requirements of the class.

MATH ANXIETY BILL OF RIGHTS[1]

As a math student, I have the right...

1. To learn at my own pace and not feel put down or stupid if I'm slower than someone else.
2. To ask whatever questions I have.
3. To need extra help.
4. To ask a teacher or TA for help.
5. To say I don't understand.
6. To feel good about myself regardless of my abilities in math.
7. To view myself as capable of learning math.
8. To evaluate my math instructors and how they teach.
9. To relax.
10. To be treated as a competent adult.
11. To dislike math.
12. To define success in my own terms.

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[1]Sandra L. Davis
University of Minnesota

Peanuts
By Schulz
YOU KNOW WHAT I THINK YOU HAVE, SIR? YOU HAVE "MATH ANXIETY"
IF I ASKED YOU HOW MANY WAYS THAT NINE BOOKS COULD BE ARRANGED ON A SHELF, WHAT WOULD BE YOUR FIRST REACTION?
AAUGHH!
SEE? YOU HAVE "MATH ANXIETY"
2-21

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WHO PUTS THE ANXIETY INTO THE MATH?

Math instructors are sometimes blamed for causing math-anxiety in students. Certainly, most people can recall a miserable experience with a brutal teacher whose only means of inspiring achievement were humiliation and badgering. However, most students emerge relatively unscathed from an occasional encounter with a tyrant, and most math instructors intend to treat their students with respect and decency. How, then, is math-anxiety maintained at the college level, and where do the responsibilities lie for alleviating the problem? As a concerned TA, how can you be sensitive to the needs of math-anxious students while respecting your own rights and the rights of other class members to a full measure of instruction?

Remedial programs for sufferers of math-anxiety may implicitly perpetuate a mistakenly simplistic statement of the problem in terms of "the good guys versus the bad guys." Math-anxious students are encouraged to get mad and assert their rights *vis-a-vis* instructors. Yes, everybody loves an underdog. We can identify with the victims of abuse and cheer as they rise up to crush their powerful oppressors. But the characters in this drama are more complex. TAs may feel trapped in their roles, responding to a multitude of conflicting demands in the best way they know how.

An example may clarify the situation. You have conscientiously and laboriously prepared for today's math lesson, (during time which you desperately needed to study for your own

exam next hour in Advanced Higher-Order Cross-Matrix Analytic Geometry), mindful of the fact that you must cover two chapters of material today in order to remain only one week behind schedule. You begin your presentation with a succinct review of the previous lesson, as an introduction. Glancing around the classroom you see: four vigorously nodding heads (your best students) urging you to proceed with the new material; three pairs of half-closed eyes in the back of the room (belonging to students who stifle their disinterest only enough to pass the course); fourteen faces contorted with effortful concentration, valiantly reviving their understanding; and two students wearing innocent, appealing expressions, looking back at you through plaintive, uncomprehending eyes. One of this last pair nudges the other, who gathers his courage and timidly raises his hand.

Student(S): "I don't understand." (meekly, with a sigh)

TA: "What don't you understand?"

S: "Anything. I just don't get it."

TA: "All right. Well, look at it this way..."

Your four best students grimace, but you begin to explain it again. M-o-r-e s-l-o-w-l-y. Using fewer technical terms. Citing creative illustrations and everyday examples. You are acutely aware that this digression guarantees falling further behind the schedule imposed on you, but you decide it's worth the effort to make sure that everyone grasps these fundamentals. Besides, the inquiring student is gazing at you with such childlike awe and attention that your sympathies (and parental instincts) are aroused. When you finish, though, his expression fades into despairing disappointment.

S: (shaking his head slowly) "I just don't know..."

TA: "Where did you get lost?"

S: "At the beginning."

TA: "Well, were you able to complete the homework using the text?"

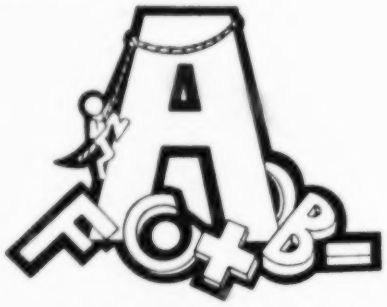
S: "I tried. I really did. But it doesn't make sense to me. I was hoping that you could make it clearer."

TA: (feeling like a failure) "Well, come see me during office hours next week."

S: (more demanding now) "But how can I take the quiz tomorrow? Can't you explain it to me *now*?"

Probably, by this time, you feel exasperated and maybe even angry about having wasted half the class time. You feel guilty about abandoning such a needy student but compelled to go on with the new material.

A strong sense of helplessness and inadequacy regarding math usually lies at the core of math-anxiety. This initially elicits an attempt to provide help, but the students' anxiety interferes with their ability to actively concentrate. Having such a low estimate of their own ability to engage in problem-solving, they are inclined to place all of the responsibility on the helper. If instructors fall into the trap of accepting all of the responsibility, they eventually lose patience and feel frustrated and inadequate as well — and perhaps provoked to berate the student.



It may be beneficial for math-anxious students to experience anger (as an antidote to helplessness) in order to mobilize their power to take constructive action in their own behalf. A "math-anxiety bill of rights" has been drawn up with this objective in mind. TAs can be most genuinely helpful by supporting these rights, *while firmly insisting that students accept the attendant responsibilities to help themselves*. These are reflected in the "math-*instructors'* bill of rights." The two lists appear side-by-side elsewhere in this newsletter. Both parties will do each other and themselves a valuble service by putting their rights into practice.

Psychological and Counseling Services are available to TAs 1) for more detailed consultation on how to respond effectively to math-anxious students and 2) as a place to refer students who want to work on overcoming math-anxiety. Call 825-4207 and ask for Larry Wampler.

—Larry Wampler

STUDENT WORKSHOPS FOR ANXIOUS EXAMINEES

Avoiding exam anxiety is, above all, a matter of skillful and adequate preparation. Nevertheless, even the best-prepared student may at times experience an inhibiting degree of anxiety within the actual exam conditions. The Learning Skills Center offers workshops aimed at improving the student's preparation and equipping him or her to handle unexpected anxiety creatively and get on with the exam. Also, each quarter the Center presents workshops on the techniques of successful essay exam writing. One-to-one conferences are also available by appointment. Please encourage your students to visit the Center early in the quarter before the crush develops.

—Nita Earnheart

The study of mathematics is apt to commence in disappointment... We are told that by its aid the stars are weighed and the billions of molecules in a drop of water are counted. Yet, like the ghost of Hamlet's father, this great science eludes the efforts of our mental weapons to grasp it.

—A.N. Whitehead

To conquer fear is the beginning of wisdom.

—Bertrand Russell

$ MINI-GRANTS $

Sixteen mini-grant applications were approved last quarter for a total of $2283.75. Approximately $2700 remains in the fund to be awarded during Spring and Summer Quarters.

Mini-grants are intended to cover the costs of improving and enriching existing undergraduate courses. They provide funds for those items or activities which are not the normal responsibility of departmental budgets and which are over and above the normal duties of teaching assistants. Appropriate uses include media rentals, field trips, specialized equipment and distinguished guest speakers' honorariums. No more than $200 may be awarded per course.

TA mini-grants which have been denied generally were asking for funds in excess of $200 or were requesting items which were part of the department's normal operating expenditures. Make sure that grant requests conform to the appropriate uses.

Application forms and more information can be found on pages 43-44 of the TA handbook. We challenge TAs to make innovative use of these monies.

CREDITS

"It takes a worried man to sing a worried song..." But we're not so worried now that we have this anxiety issue assembled. Special thanks again to **Frank Andrews,** editor of *Teacher on the Hill*, for both his editorial article and his permission to reprint the articles by **Nancy Nowik** and **Susan Ferguson.** If you haven't seen a copy of *TOTH*, you're missing an excellent series of papers on teaching and learning from UC Santa Cruz. We have file copies available in 124 Royce.

We were fortunate to have our own band of authors able to vanquish writers' block and to contribute to this issue: **Pat Caldwell, Nita Earnheart, Jason Frand** and **Larry Wampler.**

Thanks also go to **Sandra Davis, Charles Schultz** and **United Feature Syndicate,** and our own inimitable **Harold Bogus.**

DISTINGUISHED TA AWARDS

TAs who merely go through the motions of teaching often seem to receive the same credit as those who work hard on preparing their classes, organizing discussions, critically reading essays and exams, and creating worthwhile exercises. At worst, students may appear ungrateful for our time and work, professors may be indifferent, and all except our friends and family may be unaware of the commitment given to our jobs.

The instrinsic satisfaction found in teaching is reward enough for the extra effort of many TAs, but the Graduate Division, the Academic Senate and the Office of Instructional Development are seeking further recognition for excellence in teaching. Each year the Graduate Division seeks candidates for the Distinguished Teaching Assistant Award. Each department determines its own nomination procedure and forwards its recommendation(s) to the Academic Senate's Committee on Teaching. Before making its recommendations to the Chancellor, the Committee examines letters from the department concerning the exceptional qualities of the nominee, letters from students and faculty, and a summary of student evaluations.

In 1975, 1976, 1978 and 1979 the Senate made five awards, each accompanied by a cash honorarium of $200. In 1977 ten awards were given with a cash award of $100 each. It seems likely that the format of five awards will be maintained again this Spring. In addition, the Office of Instructional Development will host a May luncheon attended by University officials for the presentation of the awards. An appropriate certificate will accompany the honors.

WORKSHOPS TO EASE WRITING PAINS

Many students — undergraduate and graduate alike — suffer from anxiety and blocking during the writing of academic papers. Yet, their trouble frequently arises from persistance in old, counterproductive habits, many of which may be based on misunderstandings of the writing process itself. The Learning Skills Center offers workshops (one three-hour session each) designed to help students understand the dynamics of writing anxiety and provide them with techniques for regularly beginning, sustaining and completing writing tasks. Once per quarter a special section for graduate students is given. Consult announcements in the *Daily Bruin* at the beginning of each quarter or call the Learning Skills Center for information. Advance registration is required.

—Nita Earnheart

Once a person has become frightened of math, she or he begins to fear all manner of computations, any quantitative data, and words like proportion, percentage, variance, curve, exponential. *Some students think that a simple table in a history textbook, showing, say, yields of a crop, by year, is* mathematics, *and therefore inaccessible. Unless the same information is presented in a series of declarative sentences, they are uncomfortable with it.*

—Sheila Tobias

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the TA at UCLA NEWSLETTER

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Leann Hennig, *Editorial Assistant*

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the TA at UCLA NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 7 April 1981

UTOPIAN REFLECTIONS ABOUT TEACHING ASSISTANTS

In my fifteen-year association with the University of California, I have observed teaching assistants at work in a wide variety of roles. These have ranged from total course responsibility to the most menial forms of paper grading and course organization and administration. I have spoken with some TAs who were expected to develop and teach their own courses and with others who were expected to return library books for senior professors. Many TAs have found their experiences to be valuable preparation for their future academic or other careers. Many others have not.

Present institutional priorities and attitudes make such variation inevitable. My basic impression is that the role of the teaching assistant is mostly fortuitous, depending largely upon how each department or individual professor defines the position. At the University of California and comparable institutions, it is possible — but far from certain — that TAs will get sustained experience and useful guidance in all aspects of university instruction.

Doubtless there are faculty members and administrators who believe that TAs should have the opportunity for significant involvement in higher education. They take seriously the view that TAs should be apprentice teachers as well as scholars. Many others, however, see the position is merely a convenient way to provide financial support for their graduate students. I have even seen teaching assistantships offered as "consolation prizes" when outright grants were unavailable. Such attitudes and practices, unfortunately, reflect an indifference to education and to the needs of undergraduate students. They also reflect an erroneous assumption that proficiency in research will automatically result in satisfactory teaching.

We should not be satisfied with the present variation in instructional experiences and personal satisfactions among teaching assistants. All TAs should receive extensive training in the myriad of educational problems at the university level. Indeed, utopian as it may seem, such training and apprenticeship should be an integral part of graduate studies in general. Working as a TA should be perceived as important as graduate seminars, language requirements, oral examinations, and even the dissertation itself.

In this fanciful setting, one's performance in course planning and development, classroom delivery, evaluation of student research and writing, and advising would complement the creation of original scholarly contributions to the given field. Competence, even excellence, would be required in both domains in order to qualify for the award of the Ph.D. Presently, graduate students are provided with expert guidance by outstanding researchers in their quest to discover new knowledge. In this utopian scheme, similar guidance would be provided to graduate students in their quest to communicate knowledge to students of diverse abilities, backgrounds and interests.

These latter skills assume an even greater importance in the present depressed academic marketplace. At a time when many graduate students must consider non-academic professional careers, a serious apprenticeship as a university teacher can be enormously advantageous. The accumulation of skills in communication, tact, and personal sensitivity can complement the analytic and verbal strengths generated through research activity. Demonstrated accomplishment in all these areas would be useful in business, government service, and any other alternative to academic life.

In order for the TA role to reach its fullest potential, there must be some major changes in personal attitudes and institutional priorities. Among other things, this might mean that university departments would more vigorously reward and promote faculty members who are distinguished teachers and educators. Such men and women would be in the best position to provide the instructional guidance to the teaching assistants. Not only faculty and university administrators, but graduate students themselves, must recognize and cherish instruction as much as any other academic objective. Such changes will not occur overnight. In combination with external pressures in society and the economy, the forceful expression of utopian ideals can hasten the day when educational practice will conform more closely to educational promise.□

—Paul Von Blum

In this issue:

The Role of the TA

THE TA AS MODEL AND MIRROR

What is a Teaching Assistant? The very title is misleading. They do not merely assist the teacher; they teach. Even in classes of 500 students where a TA's duties may be reduced to passing out papers and explaining what the professor, in a fit of impassioned brilliance, could have meant in lecture by "Joseph Conrad's sense of humor," the TA still teaches. Indeed, without a TA, meaning would less frequently drizzle down from the professorial realms to the undergraduates below. And a TA's own classes, the A's, the 1B's, the 3's, and the occasional 4, the rare 1B6, all those damp little corners hidden in various departmental pockets and designed to teach skills so basic that teaching them would hardly help a professor publish his next book, in this nether world where raw, red-nosed freshmen and rude, hum-drum sophomores are turned into nascent juniors and accomplished seniors, the TA teaches.

Regardless of his or her position, either as a course's sole authority or as co-partner with Professor Omniscient Scrooge, the TAs teach well because they maintain a special relationship with their students. They are, as somebody once put it, "academic hermaphrodites," a species sporting parts of both academic sexes — student, faculty — in whom, to draw the metaphor further and to paraphrase the psychoanalyst Melanie Klien, this happy fusion of desired opposites is as symbolic and as rewarding as "good intercourse." When TAs teach, bringing together the scholarly research they have done and the student experience they still have, undergraduates benefit from the closeness and the shared attitudes, and the usual reserve that exists between professor and students does not occur here. It is as if they were being taught by a friendly older brother or sister, rather than by an officious father or mother.

Thus, it is not surprising that in most student evaluations TAs are praised for being "approachable." But we should not interpret "approachable" as mere friendliness. It is much more. The word, for me, harkens back to the Elizabethan sense of the words "kin" and "kind." One's "kin" or one's own "kind," the family, the cousins, all blood was thicker than water, because kinship promised equanimity, just treatment, shared loyalties and experiences, a special, gentle disposition. One could expect kindness from one's own kin. Relations shared more than common knowledge: they shared the ties deemed more valuable than could be expressed in words or required by contract. TAs are, in turn, closer in blood ties to the students than professors are, and the students feel that a kinship exists which can be depended upon, not only for information, not only for the contractual agreement between teacher and student, but for concern, sympathy, understanding and honesty.

Why should UCLA worry about kinship? The university is often called a community, often assumed even, especially at graduation ceremonies, to be a little more than kin, though, many would add under their breaths, a little less than kind. Need emotion, that shaggy, baggy, monster writhing daily on its back in soap operas, be cultivated here? It would seem that, given the popularity of large, impersonal classes and the recent introduction of computer programs and television to "assist" mass education, there are some who view education as a kind of electronic banking system in which not money but figures are transformed from bank to bank. Personally, I'd rather see the green stuff! — and the face of the giver as well, so that I will have received more than mere money. I feel the same way about education. It should create a sense of kinship as well as knowledge. Indeed, as Virginia Woolf once wrote, intimacy *is* knowledge. The two are inseparable.

I'll give you an example. When I think back to my senior year in high school (when the hell was that? 1964!), I remember how, after years of despising English classes, I finally decided not to major in engineering in college as I had planned; I switched to English. What could explain this change? Did I receive some new information in a lecture which transformed utterly my aversion to James Joyce? No. (Actually, I still hate Joyce, as did Woolf, but the point is it wasn't literature that changed; it was me.) If I try to recall exactly what I learned in my senior year English class that changed my mind, I am at a loss. One image, compelling in its ambiguity, remains clear though. My teacher, Mr. MacFarland, then working on his BA at Loyola University, used to tuck the lower half of his tie into his shirt, so that only the knot and perhaps three or four inches of a bizarre pattern remained. And I remember, too, how amazed I was to find that he liked my written essays. Suddenly, my grades and my prose style improved; I began to read more. I've been writing and reading ever since. And the thing I learned from him was his personal response to me — not to what information I

could parrot back, but to the way I responded to what he had given me. In our responding to each other, we became kin, and that kinship is so ineffable, so inexpressible, that I have no other image by which to remember it than the sight of his truncated tie tucked in, neat, military, eccentric, unique. It was as unique as he was, as what we shared.

MacFarland was only four years older than the students he taught. He was new to teaching and very enthusiastic. He joked about the Dodgers and about '55 Chevies. He was "one of us," a mirror image of sorts, like an older brother, but he was also a teacher. And because he was both one of us and in a position of authority, possessing knowledge, expertise, power, he could more easily represent in our minds what we hoped to become: still *us*, but enlarged, enhanced, grown up. That made him necessary. He was our model. He could mirror back our potential selves and our desire to better ourselves. We could imagine our future by looking at him. MacFarland was "approachable" because we desired to be like him: by learning from him, we were, in a sense, *approaching* him.

This explains, I think, why students — even students who never actually visit their TAs during office hours or talk to them after class in the corridors — will praise us as "approachable": they are approaching us silently, inside their own selves. It is a sign of our unique, diplomatic role at UCLA. We are transition figures, not just friendly folk; we are halfway houses for those who would imitate their professor if he did not appear so adult, so perfect, so alien. Outstanding faculty have a way of bringing out the best in students, it is often said, but excellence can also teach the lowly pupil how really inferior he or she is. No one understood better his own servility than Caliban, whose fallen nature seems as much due to Prospero's superior learning as to his own reptilian genes.

I believe that TAs are most helpful to their students when they take the magic of education out of the vaulted and often feared figure of the professor and democratize it. By doing this, they become mirrors that actively reflect back an enhanced image of the viewer. This is what they can teach that no one else can. □

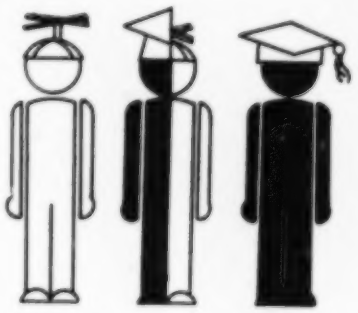
—Tom Caramagno
TA, English

"AND GLADLY WOULD HE LEARN, AND GLADLY TEACH": THE DIFFICULT ROLE OF THE TEACHING ASSISTANT AT UCLA

"And gladly would he learn, and gladly teach"

—Chaucer

Geoffrey Chaucer, as he describes the Clerk in the *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, inadvertently characterizes the ideal teaching assistant. The teaching assistant is a graduate student who continues acquiring and developing his or her own knowledge in a given discipline. In addition to this full-time obligation, and for any of a variety of reasons, the teaching assistant assumes the responsibility of supplementing the pedagogy of a professor in an



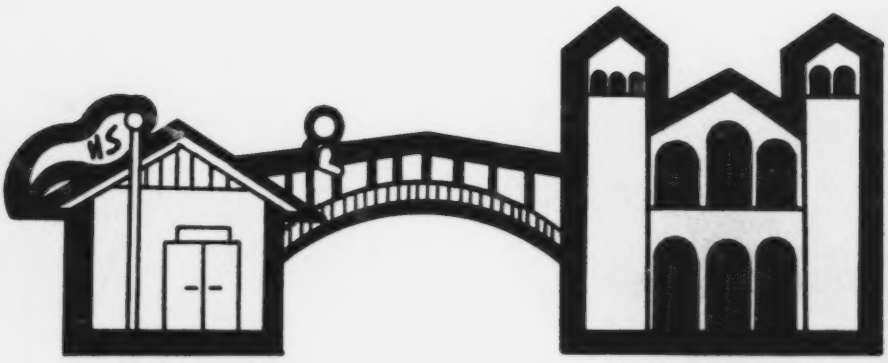
undergraduate course. The TA, then, is a kind of middle person in the educational institution. TAs lack the status of the faculty member, who engages primarily in research and teaching activity. TAs have previously, and very successfully, completed the activities in which the undergraduate is currently involved. Those who effectively fulfill the requirements of this dual position manifest, and therefore must experience, conflicts of role and responsibility with which the considerate undergraduate consumer of education must empathize. Nonetheless, while the institution, and the teachers and students who comprise it, benefit from the existence of teaching assistants, undergraduates share various concerns about both the position and those who fill it. Empathy helps students understand the roots of many problems and the exigencies of the institution that make such problems inevitable. Enunciation of concerns, however, may lead to solutions.

Different sectors of the UCLA community hold different views of the appropriate role of a teaching assistant. The University "regards teaching assistants as students being professionally trained." Teaching assistantships, then, are intended to "afford graduate students a preparatory training experience for future teaching and research oriented careers." One cannot deny the merits of this purpose but additional views of the TA's role exist, whether or not they are officially documented. Undergraduates, no doubt, view the TA as a sort of apprentice instructor, but as one whose function is to enhance their learning experience moreso than to learn how to teach. Undergraduates expect the teaching assistant to be prepared and capable of instructing. While undergraduates understand the TAs' lack of teaching experience, they would be rather disconcerted to think of themselves primarily as subjects for the training of teachers. There exists, thus, a potential conflict between these different objectives for teaching assistants. Further, faculty members seem to appreciate most about TAs the relief they provide from teaching smaller sections. The TA thus releases the professor to perform other pressing tasks. Faculty members seem generally to lack time or energy — and this lack is consistent with their perspective on the TAs' role — either to evaluate the TAs' ability to teach, or to supervise their progress in learning to do so.

Add to these perspectives the many possible views TAs may hold concerning their own role. Teaching assistants may consider their positions as any number of things: additional income perhaps, or pure learning experience. Different role conceptions lead to different expectations by the parties involved, and to different emphases by the teaching assistants themselves. Perhaps an attempt should be made to achieve a mutually agreeable definition of the purpose and role expectations of the teaching assistant.□

—David Gurnick
Student Educational Policy Commission
Undergraduate Student Association

PERSONALIZING THE UNIVERSITY: AN UNDERGRADUATE'S VIEW OF TAs



Teaching assistants have contributed significantly to my undergraduate education and, as far as I can determine, are as a group indispensable to the UCLA campus for a variety of reasons.

First, TAs often provide invaluable academic assistance. Particularly since many courses at UCLA have large numbers of students, teaching assistants are pivotal in insuring that these students understand the course material. In a fifty-minute course with three hundred students, for example, one could imagine the difficulty that many students may experience in raising their hands and asking a question in the midst of hundreds of unknown fellow students. Teaching assistants, in the smaller group discussion sections, often provide the needed opportunity for students to obtain further explanations and to ask questions. In addition, the TAs also hold office hours to enable students to seek further assistance individually. Although professors also hold office hours and often welcome students to visit them in their office during that period, more than a few have admitted that they would not be pleased if large numbers of students came to their office frequently.

In addition to answering questions and clarifying course information, some TAs provide the needed service of assisting students in writing and analytic skills. By grading their students' papers and being more familiar with their students individually, the TAs are able to provide feedback that most professors have neither the time nor the inclination to give.

Second, TAs provide invaluable emotional support that is integrally related to the academic functioning of the student. It is often traumatic for students to leave a small high school and enter an enormous university like UCLA. TAs can provide the bridge that students need to enable them to adjust to the large classes and the lack of guidance. After visiting the computer, being denied housing and parking (because they were the "wrong number" on the list), and moving into the class because they were high enough on the waiting list, students often feel as if they finally do belong at UCLA when they meet a TA who knows their name and even notices whether or not they come to class. The availability of this extra attention may turn out to be very important to UCLA's efforts to attract qualified students to this campus throughout the next decade. After all, why would students prefer to be a number at UCLA, if they are accepted at another University where they can receive more personal attention and assistance?

Third, the TA program benefits the graduate students and the University as a whole as well. In times of California's economic cutback and limits on financial aid, the TA program is an outstanding way for graduate students to receive financial assistance while contributing to the University. In addition to this financial assistance, TAs often learn valuable lessons and acquire confidence in their teaching skills through the actual teaching experience and through suggestions made to them by the professors with whom they work.

In spite of these factors, however, the TA system is not perfect by any means. While it does have a great deal of potential, the system will never be better than the TAs that comprise it. Some TAs have evoked criticism for not speaking English well enough to communicate with the students in the class. Obviously, if this communication does not occur, the students are being hurt rather than assisted by the presence of a TA in the classroom. In addition, I would hope that TAs, unlike professors, are selected primarily on the basis of their potential and desire to teach well, as opposed to any other reason one may have to place them in that position. While hopefully this occurs in most cases, there have evidently been exceptions to this in the past. Recently, several instances have been related to me in which TAs in some department have been selected merely because they were the only graduate students who had not received financial aid, rather than because they could be of particular benefit to the students.

One final suggestion is that UCLA continue to develop and expand our TA training programs. Most TAs only hold their positions for a short period of time — often not long enough to develop great teaching skills — and the students should not constantly be used as the first guinea pigs. Training could give TAs confidence and allow them to acquire fundamental skills which can then be further developed and improved upon in the classroom. □

—Leslie Lurie
UC Student Regent

"Both of my history TAs allow students to say whatever they have on their minds in discussion sections but strategically offer their own opinions. What I like is that they both guide the discussion sections yet let the students do the talking."

"I have a TA whose discussion sections are only of use if the students are able to answer the questions he asks, which are often extremely broad and difficult to answer. He gets upset when we don't answer the questions as he would like us to, which makes him even more stubborn about explaining the lectures and the readings to us."

THE STUDENTS' TEACHER, THE PROFESSOR'S ASSISTANT

The role of the teaching assistant represents a complex response to the sometimes conflicting requirements of students and faculty. That role involves interaction with students which is often qualitatively different from that which professors may have with their professional peers. It is the half-way nature of the TA's position between students and professors which provides both unique teaching opportunities and potential headaches.

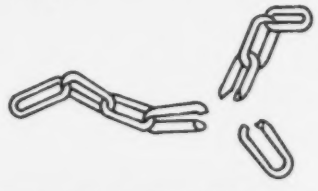
It is perhaps fruitful to examine separately the TA's role with respect to students and faculty. Since students are, in fact, the reason why TAs are *teaching* assistants, it is most appropriate to describe the TA-student relationship first.

TAs share responsibilities in common with all teachers, and these include clear and just presentation of the subject matter designed to engage student recognition of the implications of that knowledge and to foster student ability to extend it. It is, perhaps, apparent that motivation may be the complex factor which allows students to recognize and extend knowledge, yet it is not always so obvious that teaching assistants have a unique advantage in the motivational domain which professors and other teachers may not share.

If student motivation to interact with the material now and in the future is at least partially a function of the personal impact of that material on students and of the reality and applicability of the information to their future, TAs have a natural motivational edge. This is so because TAs, by virtue of the fact that they consider the subject matter important enough to stand before students and acknowledge it through their presence in the teaching role, indicate that what they teach has relevance at least to themselves and their futures.

Students can more readily perceive the similarities between themselves and their TAs than they can between themselves and their professors, and it is this perception of similarity, this identification with the TA, which may provide the necessary link between relevance to others and significance to oneself. The perception of similarity between TAs and students is due, in part, to relative closeness in age, in educational background, in experience, and in roles as students. Often TAs can identify particularly difficult portions of the course because they have experienced them as a student; this personal experience may allow their students to hurdle the obstacles by providing rationales for the incorporation and mastery of that difficult material into one's personal perspective.

TAs, by virtue of their modelling capacity, can be very compelling motivators. The possibility for mastery is apparent — "If he can do it, so can I." Competence with the material is seen as an achievable goal; mastery is not removed from possibility but is a real and, therefore, a motivating challenge. The TA can, intentionally or unintentionally, model the learning process and acknowledge the motivation inherent in the pursuit and mastery of knowledge. A TA can model seeking behavior — "I don't know but I'll look it up and get back to you."



Fortunately, it would be untrue to suggest that the identification of student with TA is complete. Students do perceive differences between themselves and their TAs. This perception of difference in capability and role can also serve as a motivator if successfully balanced with the sense of personal possibility which similarity affords. Although we as TAs may be similar in some very useful respects, we are different because we have, in fact, to some extent or another, mastered the subject enough to teach it. We are different also because we bring to the classroom a sense of commitment to what we teach — we already acknowledge the significance and personal applicability of that knowledge; and if we can successfully communicate our commitment through enthusiasm, through seriousness, through professionalism, we can push students toward a desire for similar successful internalization. We can demonstrate that mastery, though reachable, requires commitment, practice, preparation, and tangible effort.

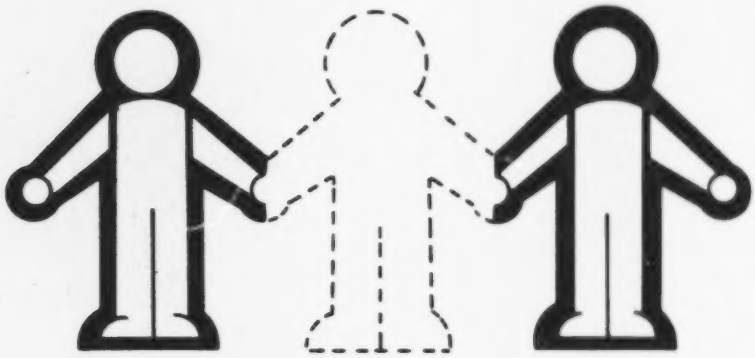
As TAs, we have the opportunity, through our often more extensive contact with our students, to discover appropriate ways to personalize the material to each student we teach. The relative size of our discussion or laboratory sections in comparison with the professor's large lecture section provides greater freedom to uncover relevant applications of the information to each student's needs and to integrate the new knowledge with individual perspectives.

The teaching *assistant* part of our role as TAs is perhaps the most difficult aspect of our jobs. In theory, the TA is apprenticed to supervising faculty who provide support and guidance so that TAs may successfully accomplish both their own and the professor's course goals. In practice, however, the TA is often left to discover, through his or her own devices, by trial and error (and sometimes student suffering) what the professor's objectives are for the students. The TA frequently operates autonomously yet is rarely fully autonomous. Most certainly, the perception that we are not truly independent and possibly not yet capable of successful independence serves to constrain a free experimentation with our own conceptual framework. We are teaching another's course by another's organization for another's goals and, in effect, are often reduced to attempting to read another's mind. In addition, many of us perceive, usually realistically, that our degree of success in mind reading may have implications for our professional futures. Academe's reliance on the subjective opinion of powerful advisors for advancement and employment is, unfortunately, often incorporated into the role we must play as TAs. We may have to balance our desire to provide our students with meaningful instruction — often attainable only through frequent communication with the course's professor, which may expose our insecurities and inadequacies — with our need to appear competent to our advisors.

We must recognize, however, that power is a two-way street. Through our contact with students we have not only the opportunity to provide direction but the potential to undermine the professor's credibility and by extension the integrity of the material we teach. Care in preserving the learner-teacher relationship, as well as the often tenuous interest of students in learning the subject, is essential. Our role as TAs, then, is to mediate and enhance the relationship of professor and student so that the knowledge and motivation, which one gives and the other accepts, are maximized. □

—Rebecca Lewthwaite
TA, Kinesiology

TESTAMENT OF A DOUBTING UNDERGRADUATE



Teaching Assistants: rather undefined in-betweens in the hierarchy of students and faculty at this our institution. I can't quite recall the official duties required of them, but their work has something to do with assistance: assistance both to the faculty and to the students. TAs have the great task of helping their professors understand their students and of helping the students comprehend the professor in question. As if that were not enough, the TA often ends up with the thankless job of having to figure out everybody's grades. Ensuing conflict guaranteed.

With my continental distrust of authority well ingrained, my first reaction to my TA was always one of careful approach, more often than not followed by scrupulous avoidance. Especially those TAs who seem to thrive on lack of concern and ignorance about anything outside of their specialty. Within this pattern of non-contact, however, there have been occasional experiences that were closer to the ideal mentioned above.

I remember well the first time a TA smiled at her mistakes, and she charmed us all into wanting to participate further in our class. A future archeologist, she spent plenty of time explaining cavemen's trash to us. Fascinating. Nothing like the many teeth and jaws we'd had to consider the week before, but if the ape-choppers had more technical terms to them, at least our ancestral remains were becoming comprehensible to us. Anyway, the woman, without really meaning to, made her answers bright and witty and told them in her own special way: charmingly awkward. It was love at first sound for those of us who recognized her rare vitality.

The second major dent in my negative ideology concerning TAs came later, when one of my old friends became one. Adaption seemed called for.

Well, the results of my new attitude have not been quite as negative as I expected them to be. One quarter another woman TA took the preposterous stand of considering us intelligent and literate. It was initially quite a shock, but then we, her class, quickly adapted and actual discussions ensued. Incredible! Unbelievable! The next quarter brought the old pattern of being considered ignorant fools, but she had left her mark. For a TA to be smart enough to recognize our native brilliance was just too much to ignore. Obviously, some TAs are not quite so dull as I thought. Really a pleasant discovery. I only hope my future dealings with Teaching Assistants won't dim this bright and positive view I've acquired. □

—Ghislaine Patthey
Undergraduate

HELPING STUDENTS LEARN HOW TO LEARN

When I came to UCLA about a year and a half ago I had a good idea of what I thought a TA was all about. However, I have had an experience I would like to share with you that has made being a TA mean much more than I ever thought it would.

Last quarter I had a discussion section in which I became genuinely excited about the class and the subject matter. I think the students sensed this excitement, and as a result the class as a whole was very attentive, responsive, and productive. That was great, but was not the best part. Some of my interest carried over to a few of the students and throughout the quarter, they came to talk to me (on a level unique to the TA) as student to exerienced student about how to study, the philosophy of the subject, and new and unique questions they had raised on their own. Through the professor's work in the classroom, and hopefully through my efforts and enthusiasm, these students had truly been inspired to *learn*. All of this may sound corny, but it made being a TA very special. □

—James L. Allen
TA, Physics

"My TA wants to make writing as enjoyable as possible — or at least as painless as possible. He carefully and thoroughly criticizes the papers we write — giving us both the positive things we should continue and develop, and the problems we should work on."

"All my TA did was work problems on the board and then get flustered when we asked questions. He had the attitude that we were either going to understand the problem when he worked it on the board or we were hopelessly unteachable. He just didn't seem to care — or maybe he hadn't thought about how to teach the skills and concepts he knew so well."

CAMPUS-WIDE TA UNION

Are you interested in re-organizing the now dormant campus-wide TA union? Did you know that:
- various departments still have active and influential union "shops";
- other departments still have active TA or graduate student associations that perform similar activities;
- and even in those departments where no such organization exists (possibly your department?), TAs and other graduate students talk of a need and a desire for mutual support and a connection with colleagues from other departments?

As a first step toward re-organizing a campus-wide TA union, we would like to form a list of interested departments and/or individuals. If you — either as a representative of an existing departmental organization or as an individual — are interested, please leave a note to that effect with your name, department, and telephone number where you can be contacted with

Jon Tierce or
Linda Paulson
c/o TA Training Office
Student Development Programs
Royce Hall 124
(Attn: TA UNION)

We will be happy to gather the names and call a meeting early next quarter. Don't miss this chance to represent your own interests while getting to know more about the university in which you work and learn. If you have any further questions, you may call Jon or Linda at 825-9269. □

—Jon Tierce
Linda Paulson

"My English 3 TA is the best one I've had in my life. He thinks appointments are very important so he schedules appointments with every student, rather than waiting for us to come in to see him — he *wants* to talk to us."

"My TA was very difficult to get ahold of during office hours but when I eventually did get to see him he glossed over my questions and ended by saying how attracted he was to me. Needless to say, this was not the kind of 'availability' I expected or appreciated from a TA."

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT VIDEOTAPING

Videotaping is becoming more and more popular as a means of self-evaluation and/or peer evaluation. For those of you who haven't yet tried it, here's an explanation of how it works and what it can do for you.

Videotaping services are provided through the TA Training Program. Many departments have begun to use videotaping extensively in their own training programs. TAs find that it's difficult to develop good teaching methods without experimentation. Videotaping, because it provides specific information about verbal and nonverbal behavior, can help to speed up the process of improvement.

Videotaping is simple to arrange. Requests for taping sessions should be made *at least* a week in advance, preferably two weeks in advance of the taping date. Arrangements can be made through the Audio Visual Order Desk, 206-6591.

Videotaping sessions last for an entire class session; the tape is then made immediately available to the TA. The TA has ten days in which to view the tape, after which the tape should be returned to the Instructional Media Office, where it is erased. If the TA wants to keep the tape, he or she must replace it.

Tapes cannot be used in personnel matters. The TA has to sign a release form and file it with the TA Training Program if the tape is to be shown to others when the TA is not present, or if it is to be retained by the department for more than a quarter.

TAs have the option of viewing their tapes alone, with the TA consultant, or with a peer observer or observers. Many TAs view their videotapes alone first, then invite the TA consultant, a few fellow TAs, or an entire 495 class to help them evaluate their performance. Both verbal and written critiques can be valuable. A form for a written critique is available through the TA consultant or through the TA Training Program.

If you have any questions, please call the TA Training Program at 825-9269 or stop by the office in Royce 124.

ALL TAPED UP AND NO PLACE TO GO?

TAs may view videotape cassettes at the following locations:

1) AUDIOVISUAL SERVICES
290 Powell Library Bldg
825-9389
Hours: Mon-Thu 8 am-10 pm
Fri & Sat 8-5
Sun 1-10

2) BIOMEDICAL LIBRARY
42-081 CHS, 9th stack level
(in large reading room)
825-6940
Hours: Mon-Thu 7:45 am-11 pm
Fri 7:45 am-9 pm
Sat 9-5
Sun 1-11

3) SCHOOL OF EDUCATION — MEDIA SERVICES OFFICE
326 Moore Hall
825-8365
Hours: Mon-Fri 8-12 and 1-4:30

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This edition of the Newsletter was a special pleasure to assemble thanks to all the special people who contributed to it. Our thanks go to **Paul von Blum, Tom Caramagno, David Gumick, Rebecca Lewthwaite, Leslie Lurie, James Allen, Ghislaine Patthey, Sheila Hoffman, Pam Mason,** and artist **Magda Diaz.** We regret to note the passing of our past contributor, **Harold Bogus.**

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the TA at UCLA NEWSLETTER

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Edited by:
Linda Paulson, *Program Coordinator*
Michelle Hernandez, *Editorial Assistant*

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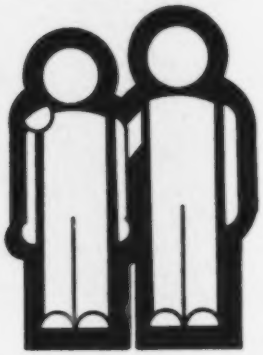


the TA at UCLA NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 8 September, 1981

THE SORCERER'S APPRENTICE: THE TA AND THE FACULTY ADVISER

How do we learn to teach? Admittedly, universities have attempted to answer this question by monopolizing a resource that had been previously considered spontaneous and democratic: in the past, good teachers seemed to be born, not made, while modern education, particularly when solidified into "education departments," daily seeks to detect, isolate, and synthesize whatever virus it is that infects the pedagog and produces, in the displaced form of a symptom, inspired teaching. But the virus still runs free, and isolated cases of superb teaching break out in the countryside even without the contrived instruction of "professionals."

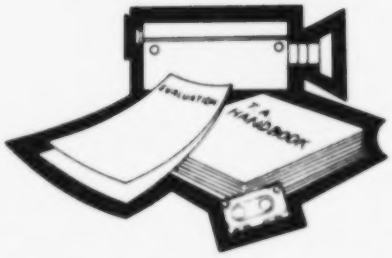
I do not mean to criticize institutionalized approaches to teaching TAs how to teach. Madeline Hunter's (School of Education, UCLA) books on the subject, for instance, are wise, thoughtful, and efficacious. The 495 courses offered by many departments are cool pavilions of shelter in the desert where new TAs can exchange ideas, problems, and support. TA Consultants observe and counsel their fellows with the sympathy arising from a shared student status and the experience of several year's teaching in that department. All of these things help enormously.

And yet something elusive remains. Surely, we learn best what is good by watching a good teacher. I suspect that most of us are in the profession because we were inspired by an excellent teacher at some point in our lives, and we seek to continue that eloquent tradition out of loyalty either to our former mentor or to our own ego. But merely "wanting" to be excellent is not enough, and sometimes that mentor's teaching style is good only for him, not for us. Neither are provocative books by themselves, nor a diligent TA Consultant, nor even the devoted attention of a 495 instructor and our conscientious peers enough to crystallize fully our own individual talents. Ideally, a new teacher should be guided by that respected mentor and given feedback while actively engaged in teaching, so that the elder's recommendations may be weighed and tested for their effectiveness by the younger. In fact, while we're dreaming, having several masters would be even better!

In the English Department here at UCLA we have a system which can approximate this ideal of apprentice and mentor. In addition to an initial 495 and a TA Consultant for two quarters, each TA (most of our TAs are the sole instructors of classes) is assigned a Faculty Adviser for every quarter he teaches. Professor Linda Venis, the Co-Director of Composition, asks for preferences from TAs, but if none are given, she will assign a faculty member she feels is compatible with the TA; if any problems occur (personality clashes, etc.), Dr. Venis makes new assignments. So far it has worked out fairly well, principally because Venis is an excellent judge of character and temperament.

The faculty adviser does four things: 1) Having given advance warning, he sits in on at least one class taught by the TA. 2) Afterwards, he discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the TA's teaching style with him and offers whatever advice he can for

In this issue:



TA Training

TA training programs at UCLA have been developing separately in individual departments for several years now. The campuswide TA Training Program, which is responsible for most of these departmental activities, has tried this year to take stock of these individual programs. Each program was set up by the department to deal specifically with the teaching situation their TAs encounter; the programs were therefore necessarily unique. Rather unexpectedly, TAs, TA Consultants and Faculty were concerned about what other training programs were offering — in short, how other people were dealing with issues that were perceived not as unique, but as common concerns.

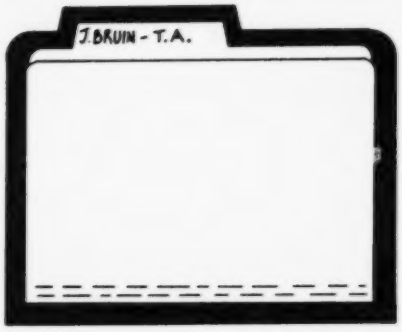
This newsletter is the result of the many requests that TA Training has received to circulate among our teaching community some of the innovative ideas and activities now being practiced at UCLA. It is our hope that these ideas will be helpful to you in your individual programs. If you have any questions about setting up any of these activities, contact Linda Paulson in the TA Training Program Office, 124 Royce Hall, extension 59269. □

— TA Training Program

improvement; together, they may plan new strategies for presenting lectures, organizing tests, and initiating class participation. Advisers often note problems the TA cannot even dream of. One of mine presented me with a sheet of paper filled with a maze of lines and coupled up words, a panoply of confused statements and crippled diagrams. "That's what your blackboard looked like by the end of the hour," he said. "After you've made your point, erase it. Don't let it detract from subsequent points." I was stunned but grateful. 3) Sometime during the quarter the adviser scrutinizes a set of graded essays from the TA's class and evaluates the merits of the grades, corrections, and written comments. (You only have to hear, "Do you think that 'Wrong! Try again.' really tells the student *what's* wrong and *how* he's going to correct it?" once to realize that your marginalia is too elliptical.) 4) He fills out a detailed report and submits it to Professor Venis for the TA's teaching file.

A word about this report. In it, the adviser evaluates the TA's presentation of subject matter (knowledge of content, inventiveness, method of organization), his control of the class and response to questions, his general appearance and behavior as a public speaker, his handling of papers and exams, and his promise as a teacher. Professor Venis files this information away, and, some years later when the TA is ready to go out into the job market, she exhumes these reports and writes her own letter of recommendation (at the TA's request), citing complimentary excerpts from advisers. If the TA teaches for a full three years, his letter could contain praise from as many as nine professors. The result is an extremely strong letter full of details and supporting evidence. Needless to say, such a system, which organized both TA training and teaching recommendations, has a profound impact upon our job prospects. Colleges evaluating our graduates for academic positions now have substantially more information to look at and be impressed by.

The adviser system has worked successfully so far; some TA-faculty relationships go on for years, especially if the TA later asks his adviser to direct his dissertation (as I did). Of course, this kind of program can be as flawed as it is promising. Obviously, not all faculty members are suited to the task. Indeed, institutions such as UCLA, which pride themselves on cold-blooded research, are as likely to tenure bad teachers as good ones: the inspired, screwball lecturer of Manic Art who mystifies even the most tenacious notetakers with his rambling discourses on the convoluted history of the Vendome column; or the dictatorial — and ever familiar demon — Professor Omniscient Scrooge, who could make Dickens hate Composition with his rigidly prescribed edicts and anal-retentive obsessions ("Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge!") — these creatures still crouch in certain dark corners of the campus.



The trick is to identify the sensitive and talented teachers and induct them for duty. Not surprisingly, most TAs here in the English Department choose professors they have already had as teachers in graduate courses — which has created, by the way, a double benefit: the TA not only solicits feedback on his own teaching from an experienced hand; he has also had a quarter's worth of experience observing his adviser's performance. Thus, what a professor *says* and what he *does* combine in the TA's spongy mind, which, trafficking as it will in a hundred smuggled goods, samples here and there the fruits of the world, refining taste. The TA's style will be an amalgam of all that he has seen and all that he has been told by several professors with their severally different teaching styles. And if he is inspired by one, more so than the others, and believes he has *the* perfect model for teaching, at least that model will stand against a background of other approaches to good teaching, so that our graduates will not go out into the world believing there is only one way to conduct a class.

Obviously, this kind of a system requires a substantial number of teachers willing to donate their time to TA training. Departments vary, and not all may accommodate such a program, particularly if TAs outnumber sympathetic faculty. Since nearly 50 TAs are employed by the English Department, a few of them find themselves, at one time or another, matched with apathetic professors who, despising the student proletariat, would rather ponder the ineffable mysteries of abstract poetry than establish a rapport with a real live human being who needs guidance and support. To make matters worse, the university gives no reinforcement to the faculty who do take the time to advise TAs; tenure and promotion committees give no specific credit for "freebies" to the masses. Indeed, considering the pressure to publish or perish, time spent on TAs is time wasted. If a professor really cared about quality teaching, UCLA would rather he kept it to himself.

If the faculty adviser system is to work well (and even though the English Department is doing a fine job, there's still room for improvement), some recognition must be given to benevolent teachers who are dedicated to excellent teaching and the TAs. Nothing so impresses an apprentice (not even the camaraderie of his peers) so much as the approving, yet critical, support from an older, more experienced teacher. But the mentor must be freed from that interminable need to hobnob with his fellow wizards in dusty print, freed at least to contribute a few hours to the education of UCLA students without jeopardizing his own advancement. The higher echelons would, it seems, prefer to rely solely on 495s and peer instruction, as if "Let the lower orders instruct each other!" were the clarion call. But I cannot see how this passes much of value between the generations. We need the benefit of faculty experience and sympathy, too. The English Department has struck gold. Now we need to refine it. □

— Tom Caramagno
TA Consultant, English

OPEN LETTER TO A BEGINNING TA CONSULTANT

Dear M_____.

You have just been told that you will be the next TA Consultant in our program. Congratulations! You are now the proud holder of a job which you are supposed to do in too little time and will do for too little money. But, almost worse than that, you have just come out of your chairperson's office with no more than a vague idea of what your job description is. Unfortunately, you were not a TA during the fall quarter, when the TA Consultant taught the 495 course and did most of the TA training. Also, you got this job because you are an experienced TA, and, as such, you did not come to the TA Consultant's consulting sessions very often. So you really do not know much about what he did. You decide to talk to him.

When you walk into his office, he is not there. But on his desk, you see a folder entitled *Notes for TA Consultants*, very official looking and promisingly fat. You begin to page through it, your heart thumping, your breath fluttering, in expectation of the long overdue revelation. But, with a sinking feeling, you begin to realize that the *Notes* provide a lot of material on how to be a good TA, but very little on how to be a TA Consultant, good or otherwise. But, no, you skipped something at the very beginning; yes, this *must* be it: *Policy for Teaching Assistant Consultants*. You just know that this will be the open-sesame, the apocalypse, the word from the horse's mouth. You read the first point very slowly . . .

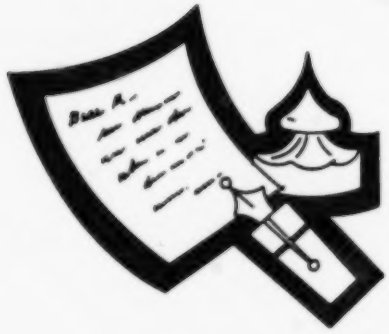
> "The title 'Master TA' has been superseded and should not be used. The term 'TA Consultant' will be generally used to avoid confusion with regular TA appointments, and the payroll category will be 'Student Affairs Officer'."

Okay, you are not to be called "Master TA." Good. After all, you did not really want to be the master of so many slaves. You are supposed to be, instead, a TA Consultant. Yes, yes, you knew *that* much. As such, your "payroll category" will be "Student Affairs Officer." Now, that does not help at all. After you have just barely escaped being a master of slaves, you are now an "officer." Presumably, there are soldiers to command. But no, you are an officer of "student affairs." Students? Which students? The undergraduates? Or the graduates who are the TAs? But if the letter is intended, then surely, you are not responsible for their affairs as students but as TAs. Or? For their affairs?! Oh, well.

Puzzled, you move on to the next points. Points 2-5 are of some value. They tell you in great detail what not to do. Do not teach undergraduates, do not participate in personnel decisions, do not keep or compile files of TA class evaluation, do not retain video-tapes. At least, now you know what you are *not* supposed to do. Point 6 states that "a copy of your departmental duties should be provided to you." You are beginning to feel that you are falling through the administrative cracks. Your chair told you to talk to the TA Consultant, the TA Consultant's desk tells you to read the *TAC Notes*, the *Notes* tell you to talk to the chair.

At this point, you begin to feel that you might want to kick a chair. But then, a strange emotion begins to take hold of you. On the one hand, you feel even more panicked than at the beginning of your quest for identity. But, on the other hand, you begin to realize that you are not the only one who does not know what a TA Consultant is. There is a feeling of relief in that, which soon grows into one of independence. For you are now beginning to realize that it will be largely up to you to define your role as a TA Consultant. And you do not know yet, but you are beginning to feel that with that realization you have just taken the first step toward becoming a really good and effective TA Consultant.

For only you know exactly what knowledge and what experiences you have to offer to your TAs. Only you can know or find out what the strengths and weaknesses of the new and old TAs of your program are. Only you can know and/or find out which forms of interaction between you and the TAs as a group and as individuals will best function to help



them become better TAs and help you become a better TA Consultant. Beyond that, there are only rough guidelines . . .

Be a good listener. Frequently, a TA will come to you for consultation, but will actually be quite capable of solving his or her problem, if you just lend a sympathetic and intelligent ear. The TA will, in effect, have come not for consultation but for catharsis.

Do not try to impose a given teaching approach on all or even one of the TAs. Each TA has unique skills and talents. Try to guide him or her toward recognizing and developing these skills and talents, and help the TAs to find their own ways of applying them most effectively.

Be humble. Share your knowledge and your experience with the TAs as openly as you can, but do not be offended or disappointed when your ideas are not adopted. Even when rejected, they may have helped the TAs to define or refine their own ideas.

Consider yourself as just another TA who has the luxury to think about teaching since you do not have to *do* it. As a sort of meta-TA, try to *assist* your TAs in their teaching rather than to *teach* them how to do it.

As you are reading these rambling thoughts, you become aware of a vague presence in the room. You look up and see the TA Consultant before you in the flesh. "Hi," he says, "I see you are reading the letter I wrote you . . ." □

— Jens Kruse
TA Consultant, Humanities

TRAINING BEFORE TEACHING: A SPRING TERM 495 CLASS

Beginning in the spring quarter '78, the Linguistics Department instituted its TA training course. In this course, the participants earn graduate credit (but not towards a degree). The class is held every spring for two hours a week. It is required of all newly appointed TAs, and it is to be taken *prior* to the commencement of the actual TA assignments. In the fall quarter, there is a follow-up to the course in which the course instructor visits classes, meets with TAs, and advises them. Given the limited time allotted to the course, the emphasis must be on the practical aspects of teaching. Therefore, the following objectives have been formulated for the course:

1. Explaining what a TA in the Linguistics Department is, and what his or her responsibilities and duties are.

2. Presenting the essential minimum of theory, including a discussion of teaching techniques, grading, interaction with students, etc.

3. Providing as much practice as possible. Such practice is expected to
   a. train the participants in the skills and techniques of teaching;
   b. provide a practice "baptism of fire," which can allay the paralyzing fear of the first class and turn it into productive excitement;
   c. create the opportunity for the participants to make beginners' mistakes without penalizing their students, to receive immediate feedback, and to be able to correct themselves rather than continue in ignorant bliss with ineffective or harmful teaching practices;
   d. allow the participants to watch their peers and learn from their successes and mistakes, while developing the mechanism for observing themselves critically, and gaining an understanding of how undergraduates feel when sitting in a TA's class.

4. Familiarizing the participants with resources available to them in and out of the department.

5. Initiating a dialog between the TAs and the faculty, so that the TAs can learn what the faculty's expectations are, and can also benefit from the teaching experience of the professors.

6. Starting an exchange between the participants themselves, in which they can discuss problems and solutions, and at least discover that they are not alone in their problems and apprehensions.

To implement these objectives, the department presents TAs with the following opportunities during the spring term 495: extensive discussion and demonstration of practical teaching techniques, presentation of a mini-lesson with peer analysis and critique, a visit to and subsequent analysis of a veteran professor's class, preparation and presentation of a section in conjunction with an experienced TA, a videotaped minipresentation with peer review, meetings between participants and two or three professors on the subject of teaching. The Linguistics Department has found that this program affords its TAs the opportunity to think seriously about teaching and to begin to develop teaching skills before they find themselves in their own classroom and responsible for their own section. The genuine commitment of the faculty in this department is apparent — and their involvement with TA training is extensive. TAs in this department are made to feel that they are being invited into a supportive community of teachers, and that their early preparation is a necessary and valuable step toward assuming their responsibility in this community. □

— Amnon Gordon
TA Consultant, Linguistics

EXPERIENCING A BEGINNING FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASS

In the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Spanish language classes are taught exclusively in Spanish, using a "direct" method in which the students themselves form generalizations about the grammar presented to them. We have found this approach to be more successful than any other we have ever tried. However, in order to be effective, it requires a considerable amount of preparation on the part of the instructor and a keen awareness of the position of the students. These points and others are made during the first day of our orientation program, in which new TAs are the students in a one-hour class taught by a former TA well versed in this "direct" approach. The class is taught in a foreign language totally unfamiliar to TAs. This year, for example, it was a Russian class; the year before, it was Hebrew. The class covers the material that the TAs will cover in Spanish during the first two days of the new quarter.

The purposes of this exercise are manyfold, but perhaps the two most important objectives are that the TA be able to view the class both from the point of view of a student first learning a foreign language and from that of an instructor teaching a beginning class. Let's first consider the student. Since the class is taught exclusively in the foreign language, after the initial introduction by the instructor, the student will very likely understand nothing at all for the first few minutes or longer, nor will he or she be able to ask even the simplest question in a normal fashion. Some students catch on quickly, but others need more time. Some understand quickly but have a terrible time pronouncing the strange new words. Some may know the language slightly and be eager to answer correctly, unintentionally intimidating other students who suddenly feel ignorant. Thus, the TA (perhaps someone with a 4.0 GPA) will find him or herself feeling somewhat inadequate, shy, or even foolish in front of peers. TAs who have taught elsewhere with a

different method may find themselves whispering the answers to the instructor's questions. Other TAs are surprised to find how easy it is to forget even very simple phrases after a few minutes. In short, the TAs are able to see for themselves how it feels to be a new student in a foreign language class.

This, of course, raises many questions if one then views the class from the point of view of the instructor. It is important to be aware that students are in an uncomfortable position: they are university students, but they are unable to express even the most basic ideas in the foreign language at the beginning of the course. The TA has to resist the tendency to draw conclusions about the relative merits of the students at the beginning of the course and throughout. Sometimes we assume that those students who are not doing well are just not very bright, forgetting they have lives outside of the language class in which they probably excel in many areas, or that perhaps they just need more time or have a problem in one area which can be overcome with sufficient practice. The instructor also needs to make sure that the class isn't dominated by one or a few students, the effect of which might be to inhibit other students from participating freely. Finally, in this exercise, the TA is able to feel the effect of praise or a smile at the right moment and see first-hand how the instructor's tone of voice, facial gestures, and body posture help to alleviate tension and create a relaxed atmosphere.

The above considerations all relate to the affective component of teaching, but the technical one is equally important. Watching an experienced TA allows new TAs to see how material can be broken into steps so that the student can understand even though the language is unfamiliar. They can also appreciate the instructor's careful use of simple grammatical constructions and a limited vocabulary rather than elaborate tenses and complex constructions. They can note the techniques used in introducing vocabulary, the pacing of the class, the use of the board, and the introduction of all four language skills (speaking, comprehending, reading, and writing) from the first day of class.

After the class is over, time is given to discussion of all these considerations. Obviously, no one will be aware of all of them during a one-hour class, and time will be given in the 495 course for further discussion and demonstration, but at the very least, the TAs come to be aware of the complexity of teaching even a single class.

The reactions of the TAs to the exercise have been varied. In general, the reaction has been very positive. Comments ranged from, "I didn't realize what it was like to be a student in a language class," or, "I was skeptical about teaching the class only in Spanish, but now I'm convinced it's possible," or, "That was great," to comments in which the TA expressed nervousness or awe at the complexity of the task.

To ease the apprehensions of the TAs with respect to what THEY will be doing the first week of class, the Russian class is followed by a demonstration class, this time in Spanish, of the first two days of class. □

— Judy Strozer
Faculty TA Adviser,
Spanish and Portuguese

BIRTH OF A VIDEOTAPING

Beginning of the quarter

Day One —
Heard about "videotaping" today; the TA Consultant described it and urged us to take advantage of it. Sounds more like it would take advantage of me. Yuck! Some stranger wheeling in all these cameras, lights, cords. Hell, I'm not good enough to be on camera. I'd probably blow it right in front of all my students and not be able to say a thing. You'd have to be a fool to subject yourself to that!

Day Two —
It's still a dumb idea.

Day Three —
. . . maybe if I prepared the class real well (I could give the students scripts!); after all, it couldn't hurt. I suppose it would be embarrassing. But it would probably be good for me (masochist!). I could wear that loose sweater, then no one could see that I need to lose weight. I'd have to make sure that the class was prepared — I know, I could xerox passages from *Madame Bovary* and give them to the kids ahead of time and tell them to prepare it for discussion. I suppose I should be up front with them, too. I'll tell them about the taping and plead for cooperation, no ask for it — mustn't sound too desparate. Oh, this is stupid anyway, and it's far too much trouble.

Day Four —
You know, it might be kind of fun to see myself on film. Besides, I don't *have* to show it to anyone else. I'll just use it for my own edification. I guess I'd better plan it for later in the quarter, after I've got some sort of rapport with my students. Now, who did he say to contact? Right, the Audio-Visual Order Desk, 206-6591.
. . .
Damn, now I've done it; I've committed myself. Oh well, it'll be good for me — like a tetanus shot.

Sixth Week

Day One —
OK. I've got everything set up — I xeroxed the passages; the students know; I've planned a really good lesson — a model of instruction, if I do say so myself . . . I use the board; I have hand-outs; I've planned diagrams that the camera can pick up (remember to play to the camera) . . . gulp. I'd better get there early to make sure everything is OK.

. . .

Lights, Camera, ACTION!

(God, what have I gotten myself into. Be friendly to the cameraman; act nonchalant; joke pleasantly with the students — I wonder if they can see me shaking. I don't remember ANYTHING! Thank God for my hand-outs! "Does everyone have those passages? . . . you forgot them (ahhh!!!). Well, maybe you can share." I knew I should have brought more extras. (They've ruined me; I look like a complete idiot!)

Minutes later —

(The camera? What do you know . . . it's still there; I forgot all about it.)

Videotaping can be quite helpful and rewarding *if* you play with it. If you fight it, the experience will be unpleasant. Beyond the initial fears and preparation (preparing the students, the lesson, the wardrobe, lighting, setting special effects, etc.), the aftermath of the taping is the most instructive part. Once you have conquered your fears and congratulated yourself on your singular bravery, there are several helpful steps to follow.

Step 1

View the tape in private first. (Powell Library has the most convenient viewing facilities on the second floor.) Also, do not disturb your neighbors with excessively loud groans; grimaces are permissible. ("This first viewing taught me something about the videotape person — he has no more experience behind the camera than I have in front of it; he hadn't set the camera up so that he could film the students' responses. Although this shortcoming could be gratifying if you like the limelight, it is an awful drain on "listening facial expressions.") Watch the tape once through uncritically; allow the self-consciousness and the disgust to recede. Run the tape over. This time view it with an evaluation sheet in hand (be familiar with the evaluation criteria ahead of time). Note both desirable and undesirable behavior on the sheet.

Step 2

Invite a couple of friends to watch it with you. For this round of viewing select only those friends who are certain to "oohh" and "aahh." (This step is the positive reinforcement step.).

Step 3

Plan on getting fellow TAs, the professor, the TA Consultant, etc. to view the tape with you in Powell's group viewing room.

a) Editing
Edit the tape to show representative sections; fifty minutes of anyone except Richard Pryor is tedious.

b) Preparation
Prepare evaluation sheets for the viewers. Also, provide any hand-outs that you used in the lesson.

c) Promotion
Prepare a glorified handout billing your show; promise thrills, excitement, and popcorn. (Tends to bring them in better than the dubious promise of instructional improvement.).

d) Evaluation
Once they've seen it — *beg* for criticism. Remember, they see themselves in you and realize the difficulty of teaching not to mention acting. Consequently, you'll get more praise than criticism; drag it out of them — it's good for both of you.

In short, you will find that you've benefitted the others as well as yourself; you will both realize that the problems that you have in teaching that "nobody else ever had" are common dilemmas.

You have two weeks after the taping in which to carry out all these steps. When you're through with it all, you can relax and tell yourself what a noble TA you've been and try to decide if there is any way that you can possibly incorporate all the things you've learned and still teach. □

— Shelby Popham
TA, Humanities

PEER OBSERVATION

I. Peerless Evaluation

Most evaluation of TAs is literally "peerless," since the people who observe TAs teaching are frequently faculty advisors or departmental administrators — in short, evaluation-writing non-peers. Even the TA Consultant, though a non-evaluation-writing TA, seldom participates in true *peer* evaluation. Although the Consultant observes the TAs, often the TAs do not have the opportunity to observe the Consultant's teaching in return. This makes the consultant a temporarily unequal equal, and a real peer exchange hard to find.

Yet there are good reasons why peer evaluation of teaching ought to become common practice.

II. Why Bother?

TAs have much to gain from observing each other's teaching. TAs can profitably share techniques, successes, and problems. Each peer observer can expand his own file of teaching ideas and materials at the same time as he helps a friend polish his classroom demeanor. The results can include a net savings of the TAs' time and a richer, more coherent teaching program. Handled with a little care, the whole process can be as close to nonthreatening as any observation ever will be.

III. Minimizing Bother, Maximizing Benefits

A peer observation program can easily be set up through a 495 seminar, can even become an integral part of the seminar. Failing that, TA Consultants are usually in a good position to initiate and coordinate such programs. Or, interested TAs can simply agree on their own to work out a convenient schedule and informal protocol. At base, all that's needed are two TAs willing to spend a couple of hours improving their teaching skills.

A peer observation program need not require major commitments from anyone, but it is important that the minor commitments involved be met. This just boils down to watching carefully and responding sensitively while wearing the observer's hat, then faithfully taking one's turn as the observed.

Making a peer observation program work well involves a little planning and diplomacy as well. Here are some suggestions which may help smooth out the pedagogical exchange and ensure that it's profitable.

A. Visitation Etiquette

1. Set the date in advance. Some people don't dote on surprise visitors. On the other hand, many unannounced observers have wound up twiddling their thumbs for twenty minutes while students take a quiz. Give the other TA a choice of dates, so that you can be sure of seeing him at his best, or at least, most typical. It's usually advisable to arrange for him to visit your classroom within a week or two of your visit to his.

2. Agree between yourselves whether the observer is to remain quietly anonymous during class, explain his presence to the students, or participate fully in class activities. Each approach has its advantages and disadvantages, but it is well for both TAs to decide what sounds most comfortable.

3. Keep the date, and arrive early (dramatic late entrances tend to disrupt class). If possible, chat with the other TA briefly before class to set him at ease and to ascertain his objectives for the class hour.

4. Decide whether the notes you'll take will be written or mental. I prefer to write copious notes while I'm observing someone else's teaching, but this makes some teachers nervous. Be that as it may, if much time will elapse between the classroom visit and the discussion it engenders, be sure to jot down your comments immediately after the class, if not during.

5. If you can't discuss the class at length with the other TA after the class is over, at least talk together for a couple of minutes before parting. Briefly mentioning the aspect of the class you liked most and throwing in a little praise goes a long way toward alleviating observation anxiety.

B. What to Observe

What do you look/hope for in your own teaching? After umpteen years of college, anyone can recognize good teaching when he sees it, or notice familiar flaws. Do watch the students as well as the teacher, though; students' response — or lack thereof — speaks volumes.

The *TA Consultant Notes* contains some useful peer evaluation checklists. You can borrow one from your local consultant or from the TA Training Office in 124 Royce Hall.

Whether or not the checklists mention anything you would not have noted on your own, they definitely can help you make your observation more systematic and your feedback more coherent.

C. Giving Feedback

The two of you can meet after each visitation, or you can wait until after you've observed each other and trade notes in one session. Either way, honesty, clarity, specificity, and tact pay off.

1. Before you confer with each other, take a few minutes individually to review your notes and organize your comments. It's important to be specific. A comment like, "You should encourage student participation," may not be useful unless you can suggest when more participation would have been valuable and are willing to discuss what might have been done to elicit it. It's usually easy to organize specific observation under general headings such as organization, clarifying objectives, and student rapport.

2. Deliver your comments in a non-threatening fashion. After all, you're out to help each other, not to pass judgment.

a) Set the other person at ease first. Talk about general aspects of his teaching which impressed you favorably, verbally reaffirm the collaborative nature of this present undertaking — whatever it takes to establish a supportive atmosphere.

b) Begin the serious discussion of the other person's class with constructive criticism, end with praise. Studies show that it is better to give "negative" feedback first, then positive (contrary to popular myth).

c) Phrase constructive feedback tactfully, putting it in second or third person (avoid, "*I* didn't like . . .") and emphasizing alternatives (i.e., never, "I thought you screwed up on X," but rather, "How would your students have responded if you had done Y instead?").

d) As you switch to positive feedback and encouragement, switch to first person so that your comments become personal validations (i.e., "I was very impressed by the way you handled Z.").

3. Give the other person equal time. Peer observation entails an exchange of ideas and responses. The more equal the exchange, the better.

4. Confidentiality can be crucial. What you see in the other person's classroom, what you say in conference should never circulate beyond the two of you without the other person's express permission.

IV. Other Forms of Peer Observation

A. Videotaping:

Arrange through the TA Consultant to have your class and the class or classes of one of your peers videotaped. Schedule a private film festival during which you watch and comment on each other's tapes. Videotape allows you to observe your class at the same time the others do, and it helps you to make your comments on others' teaching clear and specific.

B. Group Visitation:

This works the same way as binary visitation except that a number of your peers visit your classroom together and then give you a group response. Each member of the group hosts the other members in turn. Advantages: diversity and camaraderie. Disadvantage: some loss of intimacy.

Whether done in pairs or in groups, with or without technological aid, peer observation can be one of the most profitable and enjoyable ways to polish your teaching skills. A relatively small time commitment can reward you with improved teaching evaluations and a closer working relationship with the other TAs in your department. □

— Michael Moore
Teaching Fellow, English

TA ORIENTATION PROGRAM IN ESL

The ESL TAs have a great deal of responsibility in the classroom. They work under the supervision of the ESL Coordinator, but conduct the daily classes themselves. Many of our TAs are experienced teachers who have returned to school for a graduate degree and are new to UCLA; they are unfamiliar with the working of their new academic home, and need to be oriented to the campus in general and the ESL section in particular. Because of these needs, we provide a comprehensive week-long orientation program two weeks before the fall quarter begins.

ESL TAs may teach one of eight different courses. These include beginning through advanced composition, reading, grammar, and listening comprehension. Others stress communications skills for non-native-speaking TAs, including pronunciation or accent improvement. Many of the courses have a specific core curriculum which the TA must cover, while other courses have general curricula, goals, and objectives which TAs meet by developing their own weekly activities. All TAs help to develop their own quizzes, mid-terms, and finals. Quizzes, compositions and exams are all graded by the TAs, who also participate in the computation of students' final grades. Depending on the class, TAs have between four to ten hours per week of contact with students.

Orientation activities are designed so that returning TAs attend only those sessions which pertain to the courses they will teach. They do not have to sit through the general session which would be repetitious for them.

Usually the Orientation begins with coffee and doughnuts early Monday morning. The new TAs attend the session and have an opportunity to meet each other for the first time and to become acquainted with the ESL Coordinator and the TA Consultant. The TAs are then taken on a walking tour of Rolfe Hall, where most of them will teach, and they are shown the main offices, the ESL Media Room, the ESL Bibliographer's collection, and the TA offices.

After the tour, about an hour and a half is spent in describing the various classes offered by the ESL section, and briefly discussing the goals and objectives of each course. At noon, the "veteran" TAs arrive, pot-luck goodies in hand, to meet the new TAs and to provide lunch. Office staff and faculty usually attend, and the pot-luck gives people who are going to be working closely with each other in the coming ten weeks an opportunity to get to know each other. Thirty to thirty-five TAs attend the pot-luck, including alternate TAs. We encourage back-up teachers to attend the orientation so that if additional classes open up, they will be ready to teach them.

After lunch, several hours are spent reviewing in depth the curricula for all the courses so that TAs will understand how the sequenced core courses lock-step naturally with one another. Since both new and returning TAs are now present, it is a good opportunity to discuss any changes in curriculum that may have been made. Returning TAs are a great resource for the new TAs.

On Tuesday, all personnel procedures are taken care of for the group as a whole. Personnel action files are filled out or revised, W-2 forms signed, etc. We find that doing this together saves both the office staff's and the TAs' time, and makes the paperwork less tedious for all.

The rest of the day is spent administering and grading the English as a Second Language Placement Examination. Survivors of this marathon event are nourished with wine and cheese to prepare them for Wednesday.

The next morning, TAs meet in "level" meetings with others who will teach the same courses they will be teaching. They look over the curricula and textbooks for their classes and begin roughing out ten weeks of lesson plans. The returning TAs can share a lot of their expertise here with their new colleagues. All TAs are also encouraged to look carefully through the extensive file of handouts prepared by former TAs. By adapting

dittos and handouts from previous TAs, the new TAs don't have to reinvent the wheel each time they decide to supplement their textbook. New TAs are shown videotapes of the class level they will be teaching to begin to give them a feel for the student population.

The next day the TAs are given a two-hour training session with audio-visual equipment, and everyone has the opportunity to operate the videotape machine, slide projector, filmstrip projector, thermofax, and ditto machine. TAs are checked out on all this equipment so that they feel comfortable using any of the visual aids available in the ESL section.

The last activity of the Orientation is a presentation by the Office of International Students and Scholars, to inform the TAs about the ever-changing, non-native English-speaking population at UCLA. Topics discussed include differences between immigrant and non-immigrant populations, culture shock, and assimilation problems. This is followed by a panel of ESL students, who lead a discussion of the high points and the low points of their experiences as ESL students in and out of the classroom.

Before the Orientation concludes, TAs are asked to evaluate the Orientation carefully and to make suggestions for changes and improvements for the following year. Friday evening there is a traditional dinner for faculty, TAs, and families at the home of the chairperson of the ESL section.

In the following week, the week before instruction begins, the TAs meet with the ESL Coordinator or the TA Consultant to review the TAs' syllabi and their first week of lesson plans. TAs often meet with each other to plan activities and confer with the TA Consultant on an informal basis. They also attend the campus-wide TA Conference, and meet with the faculty adviser to plan their own academic schedule.

During the quarter, the cooperation fostered at the Orientation continues under the rubric of 495k, where TAs meet two hours a week, once in a general meeting to take care of administrative business or to hear guest speakers, and once in a "level" meeting, where weekly problems can be discussed, where ideas, lesson plans, etc., can be exchanged, and where TAs can hear how their colleagues are conducting their classes.

Because of the heavy demands of the academic year which TAs invariably face as students and as instructors, the ESL program has found it useful to conduct an extensive Orientation to help TAs hone their professional skills and better integrate the theories of ESL language instruction with classroom practice. □

— Ed Frankel
TA Consultant, ESL

DEMONSTRATION CLASS

Although intensive, the orientation for new TAs offered by the Department of Spanish and Portuguese cannot possibly meet all the needs of the new TAs nor answer all their questions about lesson planning and what to actually do in the classroom each day. Therefore, in order to provide support for the TAs, as well as to ensure quality instruction in our lower division language courses, we have a daily demonstration class for Spanish I each fall quarter. This class covers precisely what TAs must cover in their classes, but one day before TAs cover it.

The class is scheduled so that it doesn't conflict with any classes that the TA is taking. Attendance is mandatory for all new TAs for the first four weeks of the quarter. During that time they write weekly critiques of the class, applying what they have learned about the "direct" method taught in the 495 courses. After this initial period of four weeks, many TAs feel that they have a basic grasp of the method. Nevertheless, TAs sometimes attend the course for the entire quarter. In the TAs' evaluation of the training program, it was mentioned that the demonstration class was probably the single most helpful part of the training program.

The objectives of the class are principally three. The first is, of course, to present a teaching model for the TAs. The direct method we use requires a great deal of preparation on the part of the instructor. Because the classes are taught entirely in Spanish, it is crucial that the instructor break down the material into small, understandable steps that lead logically from one to the next, taking great care not to use grammatical constructions or vocabulary that might sidetrack or confuse the students. One of the goals of the method is that all four language skills (speak ing, comprehension, reading, and writing) be taught simultaneously. This is achieved in part by the instructor asking the students many questions or by having them ask each other questions, the answers to some of which are then written on the board. Individual students then read the sentences written on the board and correct them aloud. As stated in the instructor's manual, "Grammar is presented by examples first, rather than by rules. The students thus draw the rule themselves from a variety of chosen examples." These are the examples written on the board; the students are led to focus on certain elements in the examples, and to state the generalizations they find in them. Thus, the instructor must see to it that exactly the right examples are written on the board. This cannot be left to chance or to memory; rather the questions to be asked of the students must be carefully prepared and the steps that guide the students to draw the appropriate conclusions must be set out in advance. Thought must be given to the pacing of the class and to how often students will be asked to write sentences on the board; one wants to avoid having students constantly moving to the board to the distraction of other students, or having too many students at the board all at once. This also takes advance planning, as does the actual physical distribution of the examples that will go on the board. Finally, the class offers the TAs ideas about the many possibilities and techniques for presenting vocabulary and grammar, as well as ways in which to conduct the class in his or her personal style, even though the material covered by each TA must be the same. There seems to be no better way for the TAs to become aware of these aspects of teaching (and many others) than for them to watch an experienced instructor daily.

Because it is time-consuming to plan such careful lessons, and because the new TA generally has many other preoccupations to deal with, a second objective of the demonstration class is to provide lesson plans that the TA can put into use immediately if he or she so desires. Some TAs prefer to construct their own plan once they are aware of what should be included in it; others use the skeleton of the plan they have seen and modify it to fit their own styles; but most use the model lesson plans during the initial period of the quarter.

The third main objective of the demonstration class is to provide a testing ground for new ideas. Ideally, TAs are able to suggest ideas for teaching (e.g., the use of visual aids, etc.) and have them tried out in the class by an experienced instructor.

The above comments refer to an ideal demonstration class. However, we have encountered one major difficulty that left us short of the ideal. For the class to be truly effective, it must be meticulously planned. Since the class is going to serve as a model, it is not enough that it be a good class or even an excellent class. It must be the right class for the TAs. This means that the TA Consultant and/or the Faculty TA Adviser must meet with the instructor to go over the plans for each day or week, to ensure that the method is used correctly at all times, and to decide on what exactly is to be modeled in each lesson. Also, either the TA Consultant or the TA Adviser should attend the class on a regular basis to see what problems, if any, come up, and to be able to discuss it with the TAs who attend. This sort of supervision is time-consuming, but well worth the effort in benefits to new TAs. □

— Judy Strozer
Faculty TA Adviser,
Spanish and Portuguese

INNOVATIONS IN TA TRAINING

Faculty members in the Department of Germanic Languages are commited to the entire undergraduate language program. Each faculty member in the department is required to visit two TA sections per quarter, to discuss the TAs' strengths and weaknesses with them, and to submit a written evaluation to the Faculty TA Adviser. What appears officially as a requirement actually manifests the faculty's desire for a voice in an undertaking which supports their own. And even a cynical appraisal of this procedure (TAs are known not to be universally fond of professorial intervention in their teaching; professors often resent added demands on their time) must concede that, ideally, the entire departmental staff should be able to realistically appraise the program to undergraduates.

TAs in the department are also encouraged to visit other TA-taught classes and to make constructive criticism. And new TAs are urged to visit their *own* classes by making a tape (an audiotape) of a typical class session and then listening to it with an ear to analyzing the amount of time allotted to various activities. For example, does the TA monopolize class discussion (a grievous offense, especially in a language class)? When students finally do participate, do they sound thoroughly bored? And what of the "target" language? How much of the time is it spoken? Is it treated as a corpse for dissection or as a living means of communication? Certainly each person critizes him or herself most harshly, and this maxim applies as well to the review of videotapes of one's own class. But just as the blind person compensates for sight loss through sharper hearing, so the TA *listening* to a tape of his or her class begins to perceive vocal interaction more sensitively than is possible with a videotape with all of its visual distractions.

New TAs in the Department of Germanic Languages are also encouraged to have their classes complete *two* midterm evaluations each quarter in addition to the official university-wide evaluations. By distributing these special evaluations twice over a period of, say, five weeks, inexperienced TAs monitor their adjustments to students' criticism, thereby fostering good will in their students and bolstering their own confidence.

The Department of Germanic Languages has worked extensively at developing new and effective methods of training its TAs. The above training activities are some of the techniques the training program has found most helpful. Under the direction of the Faculty TA Adviser, the TA Consultant, the TAs themselves, and the faculty members are all active participants in the department's ongoing efforts to improve its undergraduate instruction. □

— Eric Allen
TA Consultant,
Germanic Languages

FACULTY PARTICIPATION IN 495

Kinesiology 495 has been organized around two principles: provision of specific instruction to in-teaching technique and style, and enhancement of TA motivation to improve individual teaching performance. Consequently, our approach to fulfilling these objectives has centered on achieving an optimal balance of faculty and TA participation in 495. One such approach allows a comfortable setting for discussion by TAs, supplemented by guest lectures and discussions with competent and concerned faculty.

Some topics in 495 are best presented by faculty who demonstrate particularly impressively their expertise in an area. For instance, during our last 495, three professors, well-known for their mastery of lecture preparation and presentation, their facility in engendering student participation and involvement in class discussions, and their appropriate use of visual aids to compliment verbal instruction, were invited to present their respective philosophies and strategies on these subjects to TAs in 495. Formal and informal evaluation by the participating TAs indicated that these faculty not only provided very helpful instructional hints, but also served as motivators by modeling a genuine concern for teaching — a concern which is not often publicly and meaningfully expressed by veteran instructors in our research-oriented institution.

To maximize the effect of faculty participation, it may be important that faculty participate only occasionally, and that efforts be made to include those faculty who will be enthusiastic and competent participants. In that way, both TAs and faculty see the opportunity to participate as more of an honor than an unwanted obligation. This attitude can serve to increase both the informational and motivational effects of faculty involvement in 495.

Although there may be several ways to gain faculty participation, our method has involved drawing up a proposed list of topics and soliciting recommendations of experts from our chair, some faculty, and TAs. The faculty members who have been suggested are then contacted by the TA Consultant sometime before classes begin in the fall, and are invited to give a presentation in 495 during the coming quarter. We have been fortunate to be working with a faculty which values teaching excellence and considers contributions to 495 instruction a part of its professional commitment to both its undergraduate and graduate students. The forum which 495 provides for the sharing of perspectives and constructive communication between faculty and apprentice teachers is beneficial to both faculty and TAs, as well as to the undergraduate students both groups serve. □

— Rebecca Lewthwaite
TA Consultant,
Kinesiology

TA APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM IN PHILOSOPHY

The Philosophy Department offers a unique apprenticeship program as part of its regular TA Training format. First-year philosophy graduate students are not TAs their first year; therefore, during this time, they have an opportunity to learn the techniques and strategies they will need in order to perform the duties of a TA their second year. In the winter quarter, the students participate in a one-hour weekly program to orient them to their duties as future philosophy TAs, and to advise them as to the various teaching techniques they may find useful in conducting their discussion sections. Such seminars are used, among other things, to conduct mock classroom sessions to give the prospective TAs a chance to try out some of the teaching techniques they have learned.

However, because these graduate students must practice their teaching on other graduate students, in particular on those whom they know very well, such mock sessions fail to introduce the graduate students to the environment in which undergraduate learning takes place. And it is some feeling for, if not some mastery of this very environment, which the Philosophy TA training program hopes to provide the first-year graduate student. Therefore, in the spring quarter, those first-year students who are interested in doing so may serve as apprentice TAs to more experienced TAs. This apprenticeship, in essence, allows the prospective TAs to test the waters of the undergraduate teaching experience first-hand, while still under the tutelage of an experienced TA.

This apprenticeship program is conducted in the following way: each interested first-year graduate student is assigned by the TA Consultant to an experienced TA in the Philosophy Department who has expressed a willingness to participate in the apprenticeship program. The TA and apprentice graduate student together attend approximately one week of undergraduate lectures. The apprentice then attends one or two of the TA's discussion sections which cover the material and/or readings to stimulate group discussion. The TA and apprentice then discuss any particular strategies which the TA finds useful for teaching the particular philosophical topic under discussion. The two then attend another set of lectures, after which the apprentice then conducts one discussion section, under the observation of the regular TA. The TA and apprentice then spend some time in a private tutorial reviewing any strengths as well as weaknesses of the session, if and when they occur. The apprentice then has a much better understanding of the particular strategy for leading discussion sections which he or she will adopt in the fall.

It is important to conduct these sessions early in the quarter so that undergraduates do not feel they are missing some vital mid-term or final review session from their regular TA. Also, the professionalism with which the TA introduces the apprentice is important. For example, it is a good idea for the TA to inform the class of the nature of the apprenticeship program and to assure the students that they will be receiving an especially fine discussion leader for the day. The apprentice should not be made to feel that the students are only grudgingly acceding to the TA's request that they engage in a dialogue with the apprentice, nor should the students feel they can simply sit back and forget about learning philosophy for that hour. The students are usually quite willing to work with a new discussion leader, especially when their TA is also present. But the TA can make the environment one most conducive to learning by explaining the reason for the substitution and assuring the students of a good discussion.

This program meets with more or less success, depending upon the enthusiasm of the first-year students and the willingness of experienced TAs to sponsor the apprenticeship. At present, this is not a part of the Philosophy TA training program for which either TA Consultant or experienced TAs are paid. However, there is every reason to think that if this program were specified as a regular part of the TA Consultant's program duties, some remuneration to the TA Consultant and/or experienced TA would be in order. Such factors are decided on the basis of the needs of the individual departments themselves and available funds from the Office of Instructional Development.

In short, this apprenticeship program can give the prospective TA an idea of the sorts of problems to be faced, techniques to be used, and duties to be performed within the undergraduate classroom situation itself. In this respect, it provides the prospective TA with the kind of experience that in-class seminars on teaching techniques or videotapes of mock-sessions cannot. The more we can prepare our TAs for those first few weeks of classes, the better their overall performance will be. If this is one of the goals of any TA training program, then departments throughout the university should consider adopting something like the apprenticeship program outlined above. □

— Linda LeMoncheck
TA Consultant, Philosophy

MIDQUARTER EVALUATION OF TAs IN THE PHYSICS DEPARTMENT

In the Physics Department, the TA Consultants traditionally evaluate each new TA in the middle of his or her first quarter of teaching. This evaluation, which is independent of other departmental evaluations, consists of student responses to a list of informal questions about the performance of their TA. The following is a description of how the evaluation is carried out, and how its results are utilized.

In the middle of the quarter, with prior permission of the TA to be evaluated, the TA Consultant visits one of the new TA's classes, both to observe the class personally and to have the students in the class fill out the above-mentioned questionnaire. Then at some later date, the TA and the TA Consultant meet and confidentially discuss the results of the evaluation, as well as the TA Consultant's observations of the class. The individual evaluations are not seen by the TA. Any further evaluations of this type, conducted in the TA's second quarter of teaching, for example, is done only at the TA's request, occasionally on the recommendation of the TA Consultant.

The sole purpose of this evaluation is to help the TA improve his or her performance while the TA still has time to implement improvements before the end of the quarter. Also, because this evaluation has nothing to do with the rest of the department, it can be specifically designed to help improve performance and not just to indicate who is a good or a bad TA. In other words, because of the questionnaire design and the equally important personal input from the TA Consultant, the entire evaluation procedure not only measures performance, but indicates what steps need to be taken to correct any weaknesses in the TA's teaching methods.

With very few exceptions, all new TAs in the Physics Department teach lower division physics laboratory sections in their first quarter assignment. Because of this, the midquarter evaluation has been developed to ask questions specifically dealing with the TA's performance in a laboratory. However, as can be seen from the copy of this evaluation that follows, the questions could easily be altered to apply to different teaching situations.

All in all, new TAs have found the mid-quarter evaluations in their first quarter of teaching to be quite valuable, and thus, these evaluations have become a very successful tool for the Physics Department TA training program. □

— James Allen
TA Consultant, Physics

TA Evaluation — Midquarter

Physics lab students:

Please complete this form as frankly as possible. It *will not* be seen by your TA. The results of this poll will be compiled by another TA (the TA Consultant) and be used *informally* to improve your TA's teaching ability through discussions between the TA Consultant and your TA.

1) Does your TA speak clearly? Yes □ No □
2) Does your TA write clearly on the blackboard? Yes □ No □
3) Does your TA address the class when lecturing? Yes □ No □
   (as opposed to, say, talking to himself or herself or to the floor)
4) Does your TA come prepared to the lab? Yes □ No □
5) How much time does your TA spend lecturing on the lab material?
   too little □ too much □ just right □
6) Are your labs graded promptly? Yes □ No □
7) Are your labs graded consistently? Yes □ No □
   (i.e., compared to the grading of your fellow students)
8) An important aspect of teaching is motivating the students. At times, motivation to do a physics lab can be quite low. Does your TA at least try to inspire motivation towards learning? Yes □ No □
9) On a scale from 1 to 10, 10 being the highest mark, how would you rate your TA?
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
10) What do you feel is your TA's strongest attribute in teaching this lab?
11) What do you feel is your TA's weakest point in teaching this lab?
12) Does your TA have mannerisms or habits which interfere with his/her teaching? Specify.
13) Additional comments relevant to this evaluation:

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE DURING TA TRAINING

By virtue of a unique Department of Italian policy in the awarding of Graduate Division Fellowships, entering Teaching Assistants are not given teaching responsibilities until their second term at UCLA. Since 1979 the Department has offered incoming students a TAship for winter and spring quarters, integrated with a Fall Quarter Fellowship that allows for a monthly stipend close to a full-time TA salary.

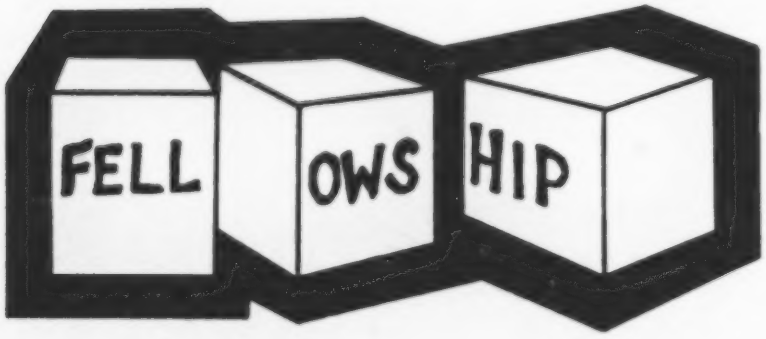
This policy was made possible by new University regulations which allow the Department to split what were once full-year fellowships into a relatively large number of quarterly awards. Thus, the Department is now in a better position to respond to both the academic needs of incoming TAs and the challenge of providing quality instruction in the elementary language courses.

In a recent interview, Department Chairman Marga Cottino-Jones stressed the advantages for both the graduate students and the language program itself. "I think the main problem was stress. The academic demands plus teaching responsibilities were too much in the first quarter. They could destroy a student." In the past, students had been expected to teach a language course, carry a heavy load of coursework, and adapt immediately to the new environment represented by Los Angeles and UCLA. In addition, a vast majority of these students had no previous teaching experience.

From the Department's point of view, it was also difficult to anticipate accurately the incoming students' proficiency in Italian, especially considering that the vast majority of students in the Department are non-native speakers of Italian. Thus, the first-quarter fellowship allows the Department time to screen the new TAs and locate gaps or weak points in their knowledge of the language. Since 1979, an intensive grammar course has been required of those students in need of additional preparation.

The positive results of this fellowship program include increased enrollment and higher achievement by students in elementary language courses. The response of the TAs themselves has been enthusiastic. Michael Sherberg, a first-year grad, commented, "It really meant a lot to me in terms of perfecting my knowledge of the Italian language and making a good start in terms of my degree program." □

— Ted Cachey
TA, Italian Department



THE UCLA WRITING PROGRAMS

Directed by Professor of English, Richard Lanham, the Writing Programs heads into its third year of improving writing across the campus: from the Medical School to MacGowan Hall, from freshmen to graduate students, from English majors to administrative staff.

In addition to directing this network, Professor Lanham also serves as the English Department's Vice-Chairman for Composition. The Department's Composition Section offers the freshman sequence of courses (English A, 1, and 3) as well as English 131 (Advanced Expository Writing) and English 136 (Practical Writing and Editing). You can direct students to these classes.

You can also steer them into the Writing Programs' innovative adjunct classes, 2-unit Intensive Writing sections attached to subject-matter classes. These sections stand double-listed in the Schedule of Classes — under the base course department and under English, as "English 100w."

Some of you may find yourselves teaching for a class attached to a 100w section; others of you will undoubtedly wish you were. If you come to feel at a loss in handling student papers, the Writing Programs offers further help. It has brought together a group of English Department TAs who serve as Writing Consultants to other departments.

Based on a preliminary visit with a department's TA Consultant or Advisor, the Consultant prepares one or more 1-2 hour presentations. Each presentation can focus on one of several topics: evaluating student writing, activating the writing process, or revising prose.

If you'd like a Writing Consultant to meet with your department's 495 class or with a group of its TAs, discuss the idea with your TA Consultant or Advisor; or call Susan Fletcher at 825-3647 or 206-6815. □

ACADEMIC RESOURCES COORDINATION

ARC, the Office of Academic Resources Coordination (77 Dodd, 206-6681), helps students make the most of their educational opportunities at UCLA. ARC's services include Advising and Referral, Tutorials, the Learning Lab, and Orientation.

The Advising and Referral Service is staffed by regular ARC members and Counseling Assistants (CAs), graduate students who divide their time between their own departments and ARC. Any undergraduate is welcome to come in and discuss his or her concerns with one of these staff members, who may then refer the student to ARC services, such as tutorials, the Learning Lab, or CA advising for course selection and other support, or to other services on campus. ARC also provides on-going advising to a group of entering students who the CAs have identified during Summer Orientation as likely to benefit from a sustained counseling relationship.

In collaboration with UCLA Writing Programs and the Mathematics Department, ARC offers free peer tutoring in composition and lower division math. To use the Math Tutoring Center (MS 3973, 206-6965), students should obtain written referrals from their math instructors or TAs or from ARC. For writing assistance in composition or other courses, students can call or come to ARC for appointments. ARC also sponsors several pilot tutorial programs attached to specific courses. The Academic Advancement Program (AAP) offers its own comprehensive tutorial services in Campbell Hall, and AAP students should be referred to this service.

Students who want to improve their academic performance could find the ARC Learning Lab a valuable resource. The Lab offers handouts and audio and video self-instructional programs on study reading, rapid reading, listening, note-taking, concentration, time management, objective and essay exam preparation, etc. Counselors here can help students identify their ineffective study processes and direct them to the appropriate materials. The ARC Learning Lab also offers computer-assisted instruction to complement course offerings and to help students improve basic skills.

In addition to running Summer Orientation, ARC provides continued orientation through its advising and referral services and its library of course and major descriptions available year round.

By directing students to the services available to assist them and by helping them plan academic programs that best meet their interests and abilities, ARC assists students in realizing their own potential and that of UCLA. □

— Judith Collas
Academic Resources Coordination

COMPOSITION TUTORING LAB

A common TA problem is knowing what to do for students who cannot write well enough to demonstrate what they may have learned. Helping students individually with their inadequate writing may demand more time and patience than you have at your disposal.

Fortunately, UCLA provides services for students who would like more writing help than you can offer. Academic Advancement Program (AAP) students should be referred to AAP tutorials in Campbell Hall. Other students can come to the Composition Tutoring Lab sponsored by UCLA Writing Programs and supervised by Academic Resources Coordination (ARC). Designed primarily to support the basic composition courses (English A, 1, and 3), the Lab can also assist students with writing assignments for other courses. Non-native speakers of English find the Lab a particularly valuable resource.

The undergraduate peer tutors staffing the Lab are good writers, successful students, and friendly, perceptive people. As part of their preparation, they take English 131, Advanced Exposition, where they practice peer critiquing and editing. Through ARC they are trained in tutorial techniques and ESL assistance. The tutors' job is to help students help themselves; they will not write your students' papers for them.

If you would like your students to take advantage of the Composition Tutoring Lab, please announce its availability early and often during the quarter. The tutors can help students with getting started on writing projects or preparing for essay exams as well as with editing rough drafts or understanding the red marks on returned papers.

Non-AAP students interested in composition tutoring should call or come to ARC (Dodd 77, 206-6681) for appointments. If you would like to learn more about this service or discuss how it might best serve your students, please call Dr. Judith Collas, Composition Tutoring Lab Supervisor, in ARC, 206-6681. □

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